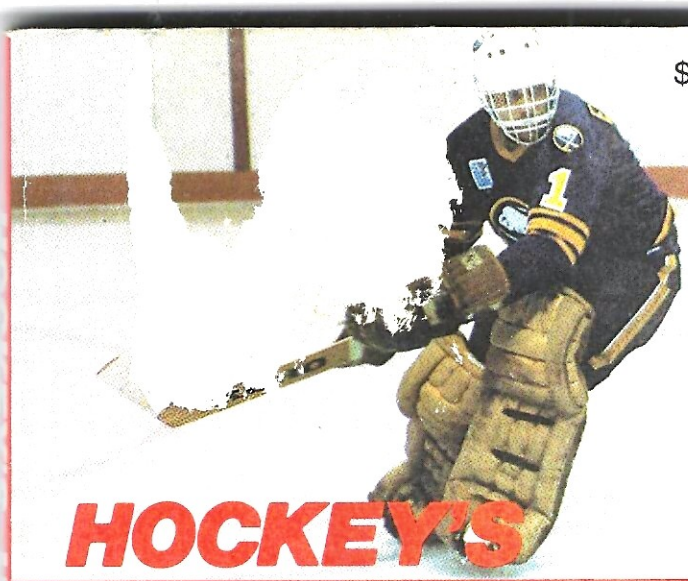
$1.25



HOCKEY'S HOTTEST STARS

Angelo G. Resciniti

HOCKEY'S HOTTEST STARS

Angelo G. Resciniti

Copyright © 1981 by School Book Fairs, Inc.

Dedicated to Dotty and Lou Collazzi and Frances and Phil Tripken for helping me grow wings in '72.

Also dedicated to the Rubideaux Flash.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following people helped make this book possible. Thanks to all. Paul Wieland and Gilbert Perreault of the Buffalo Sabres. Bill Twelly, Elaine Ell, and Wayne Gretzky of the Edmonton Oilers. Mark Howe of the Hartford Whalers. Patty Connolly of the Minnesota North Stars. Kathy Best of the Detroit Red Wings. Janet Halligan of the New York Rangers.

CONTENTS

Wayne Gretzky 9
Bryan Trottier 19
Guy Lafleur 27
Bobby Smith 37
Don Edwards 45
Marcel Dionne 55
Mike Bossy 63
Mark Howe 73
Barry Beck 83
Bobby Clarke 89
Gilbert Perreault 101
Dale McCourt 112
Don Maloney 117
Buddy Cloutier 122

WAYNE GRETZKY
(Edmonton Oilers)

"This kid is going to rewrite the record books."

The speaker was Glen Sather, coach of the Edmonton Oilers. The kid was Wayne Gretzky, barely 19 years old. The 1979-80 National Hockey League (NHL) season had just ended. And "the Great Gretzky" had just rewritten a chapter of the record books.

Gretzky did it all during his first NHL season. He tied for the league lead in scoring with Marcel Dionne. He made the NHL all-star team. He won the Molson Cup. He won the Charlie Conacher Trophy for community service. He won the Lady Byng Trophy for sportsmanship. And he surprised everyone by taking the Hart Trophy as the Most Valuable Player in the NHL.

At 5'11" and 165 pounds, Wayne Gretzky is not big. He isn't very strong, either. And he isn't very fast. One look will tell you he's not a great skater. But he knows how to play ice hockey. He knows how to score. He does the job.

Gretzky was born in Brantford, Ontario, on January 26, 1961. His father, Walter Gretzky, had him on skates before Wayne was three

years old.

At five Wayne made his first all-star team. That's not all that surprising. But Wayne made all-star in a league of 10 and 11-year-olds. By the time he was 8, he was starring in Bantam League with 14-year-olds.

Wayne played 68 league games when he was 11. He scored 378 goals. That's an average of over five goals per *game*. In one game his team was down 3-0 going into the third period. In a 45-second span Wayne scored three goals and tied the game, all by himself.

At 14 Wayne had to live away from home so that he could play in a quality league. He played against boys 16, 17, and even 18 years old. During that season he broke the 1,000-goal mark for his career.

"That was a big thrill for me," Gretzky recalled. "I still have the hockey stick and puck I scored it with."

Despite the great number of goals, Wayne also learned to be a team player.

"When he was younger he scored so many goals that he tried to attract attention away from himself," said his father. "He was worried about being called a puck hog. So he set the other kids up. He liked to share things with the rest of the boys."

Wayne turned 16 near the end of the 1976-77 junior hockey season. After his birthday he moved up to the Peterborough Petes. The Petes played in the tough Ontario Hockey Association

(OHA). Gretzky only got into three games with the Petes. But he picked up three assists.

The Sault Sainte Marie Greyhounds signed Gretzky for the 1977-78 OHA season. The 16-year-old center got off to an impressive start. He scored three goals—the hat trick—in his very first game. By Christmas he was tearing up the OHA.

Gretzky's fine play earned him a spot on Team Canada for the World Junior Cup Championships. The eight-team tournament was played in Montreal during Christmas season, 1977. Gretzky was the youngest player in the whole tournament.

He also ended up as the best. Canada finished a disappointing third in the series. But Gretzky led all scorers with 17 points. He had eight goals and nine assists in six games. Wayne was the only Canadian named to the all-tourney team.

"That was the highlight of my junior career," said the left-handed shooting flash. "I had a lot of fun."

Gretzky returned to the Greyhounds after the tournament. By this time he was considered the best junior player in all of Canada. People were comparing him to past greats like Guy Lafleur and Bobby Orr. Rumors began to spread that the Great Gretzky would turn pro after the 1977-78 season.

"Mentally I'm ready for the pros right now," he admitted after the tournament. "But physically

Edmonton Oilers Photo

Wayne Gretzky in action.

I'm not."

Gretzky said then that he would play one more year in the OHA before signing with a professional team.

Wayne played in 64 games during the 1977-78 season with Sault Sainte Marie. He scored 70 goals and an amazing 112 assists for 182 points. His point total was an OHA record. But somehow Gretzky made only second team all-OHA.

The World Hockey Association held its annual draft in May, 1978. The Indianapolis Racers drafted Gretzky. At 17 Gretzky was an underage player. Few underage players had ever been drafted before. But Gretzky was considered too good to pass up.

The Racers made Gretzky an offer that was also too good to pass up. Wayne skipped his final year of junior play. He decided to turn pro.

"I felt that I could advance my hockey skills more quickly by stepping up to a higher level of play," he explained later. "Earning a better living was important, too. It was better than the $15 a week I was making in the juniors."

By signing with the Racers young Gretzky became the youngest player in World Hockey Association (WHA) history. He also became the youngest player in any big league sport at the time.

Gretzky reported to training camp with the Racers in the fall of 1978. Reporters surrounded the teenage star. He reminded writer after writer

that Wayne Gretzky was just another kid who liked to play hockey.

"When I'm 23 I don't want to look back and feel I missed being a teenager," he said. "I want to be a hockey player *and* a normal 17-year-old."

Wayne started the 1978-79 season in Indianapolis. But the Racers—and many of the other WHA teams—were in terrible financial trouble. Everyone figured that 1978-79 would be the last season for the WHA. The NHL would pick up the best players. And just maybe the NHL would pick the strongest WHA teams in one piece.

The Edmonton Oilers were one of those strong WHA teams. Eight games into the 1978-79 season the Oilers bought Gretzky's contract from the Racers. Wayne had scored three goals and three assists for six points with Indy.

Edmonton team president Peter Pocklington was happy about getting Gretzky. "We feel that if we're going to be in the NHL, we need a superstar. And Wayne is going to be one."

"Wayne has innate hockey sense like all the great players," said Glen Sather, his coach. "Coming out of his end, he always seems in position to take the pass. And when he gets the puck he knows where everybody is, the way a center is supposed to."

Sather added, "I hate to put this on him, but a player like Gretzky comes along only once in every ten years. He's not up there with Orr, Hull,

or Howe, yet. But he's not far away, either. He firmly believes he's going to be the best player in the world."

Gretzky finished his rookie season as the third best scorer in the WHA. In 80 games he bagged 46 goals and 64 assists for 110 points. He was named second team all-WHA. As expected, he was the WHA Rookie of the Year.

Edmonton finished with a 48-30-2 record in 1978-79. The Oilers won the last-ever WHA regular season title. But Edmonton lost out in the playoffs.

Gretzky later reflected on his first season of professional hockey.

"The goaltending is better in the pros—that's the big difference," he said. "Otherwise, there isn't as much slashing and high-sticking as there was in the juniors. They let you play hockey more. I'm actually getting more opportunities than I ever did. In that way playing here hasn't been that much of an adjustment. In fact, it's been pretty easy."

The teenage sensation said that the hardest adjustments didn't even involve hockey.

"The biggest adjustment was off the ice," Gretzky said. "I didn't know how the players would react to a 17-year-old playing with them. It was different for me, too. Most of the pro players have families. After practice they went off for home. In juniors we all hung out together. But I'm used to it all now. And I'm sure the other players are used to me."

Gretzky had to adjust to a whole new set of players before the 1979-80 season. As expected, the WHA folded. Four of the old WHA teams joined the NHL. Edmonton was one of the four. Gretzky and his teammates were suddenly in the old, respected NHL.

"I can hardly wait to see what happens when the big guys in the NHL see him," said coach Sather about Gretzky.

Gretzky got a big thrill a month into the 1979-80 season. He finally played a game at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto. The Maple Leafs had been his idols when he was growing up in Ontario. For the first time he would play against those idols as a pro. Wayne's parents, grandparents, high school buddies, and hometown friends filled the stands. Wayne impressed everyone with his play. He scored two goals in a 4-4 tie.

"Since I was a kid of eight or ten I used to watch my favorite players on the Toronto team every Saturday in Brantford [on TV]," recalled Gretzky that night. "Now, here I am in the same building. The whole thing is a little awesome for me."

"Awesome" was used quite a bit to describe Gretzky's play during the 1979-80 season. He turned 19 midway through the season. And all season long he battled for the league lead in goals, assists, and points.

On April 1, 1980, Wayne scored his 50th goal of the season. No teenager had ever before

scored so many goals in the NHL history. But that day his Oilers tied the Minnesota North Stars, 1-1. The tie was more important to Gretzky than the goal.

"Sure, I'm happy to hit the 50-goal mark," he said after the game. "But I'm not pleased about missing several good chances to win the game."

The Great Gretzky finished the season with 51 goals and 86 assists in 79 games. His 137 points tied Marcel Dionne for the NHL lead. But Dionne scored two more goals than Gretzky did. So Wayne officially finished second in the NHL in scoring. Wayne's 86 assists, however, was number one in the league.

After the season the awards rolled in. Second team all-NHL. Molson Cup. Charlie Conacher Trophy. Lady Byng Trophy. And the big one—the Hart Trophy as the Most Valuable Player in the NHL.

Gretzky's fine season helped Edmonton to a 28-39-13 record in 1979-80. The Oilers had the best finish of any of the old WHA teams. Edmonton made the playoffs but was knocked out in the first round. Even Wayne Gretzky couldn't help the Oilers' bid for the Stanley Cup. At least not yet.

"Wayne's a perfectionist," said his father. "He'll practice something for months before he'll try it. He practices what he can't do.

"But the biggest thing of all is he loves the game so much," added Walter Gretzky. "That's all he did, winter and summer. Other kids went

to the movies. He fooled around with a puck and a hockey stick. He just loved the game of hockey. And he never quit."

"Getting a lot of practice at an early age was important," agreed Wayne. "I've also had a lot of good opportunities. And now I'm getting a lot of support from my teammates. We're helping each other get better."

Gretzky gives kids the same advice he followed as a young player.

"It was the best advice," said Wayne. "You have to practice all of the time. And you have to set your priorities straight. If you want to be a hockey player, you have to put hockey number one."

And number one now for Wayne Gretzky is winning the Stanley Cup.

"If you shoot for the Cup, everything else will fall into place," said Gretzky. "Individual records are nice to have. If you're playing well enough to set records, that helps your chances at the Cup. Winning the Cup is what it's all about."

BRYAN TROTTIER
(New York Islanders)

Off the ice he bangs out tunes on the piano and strums soft rock on the guitar. His soft, curly hair and unmarked face lie about his profession. They also lie about the way the man plays ice hockey.

Bryan Trottier works hard on the ice. The Islanders' center skates hard. The 5'10" 183-pounder checks hard. The playmaker makes the hard pass look easy. And when opponents try to knock him off the puck they learn there's no way. They learn the hard way.

"Trottier's hidden talent is that he looks like an altar boy and hits like a monster," said Johnny Wilson, coach of the Pittsburgh Penguins.

"I just love playing along with Bryan," said linemate Mike Bossy. "He makes everything look so easy, but you know he's working so hard. I know he's helped me."

"He's a complete hockey player," said Islanders' coach Al Arbour. "And there aren't too many of those around anymore."

The "complete hockey player" had two incredible seasons in 1978-79 and 1979-80. In

1978-79 Trottier led the NHL in scoring and won the league's Most Valuable Player award. Then in 1979-80 Bryan led the Islanders to the first Stanley Cup victory in the team's history. Not bad for a young hitter who had not yet celebrated his 24th birthday.

Trottier was born on July 17, 1956, in Val Marie, Saskatchewan. He got a late start in ice hockey. Young Bryan didn't start playing until he was nine years old.

But "Trots" caught up quickly with the other kids. He played the usual league hockey. At 16 he began playing on the junior level.

Bryan joined the Swift Current Broncos for the 1972-73 Western Canada Hockey League season. In 67 games he scored 16 goals and 29 assists for 45 points. The left-handed shooter didn't exactly tear up the league.

Trottier improved tremendously in the 1973-74 junior league season. In 68 games he scored 41 goals and handed out 71 assists. His 112 points impressed a lot of NHL scouts.

The New York Islanders drafted Trottier in the second round of the 1974 amateur draft. But Trottier didn't report immediately to the NHL club. He played another season of junior hockey first.

Bryan played with the Lethbridge Broncos in the 1974-75 season. In 67 games he scored 46 goals and handed out 98 assists. His 144 points put him among the league leaders. He was named a first team all-star after the season.

Bryan Trottier scores again.

UPI Photo

Trottier reported to the Islanders for the 1975-76 NHL season. A huge crowd turned out for the Islanders' home opener. The fans wanted to see this rookie star in action.

Trots had the type of opening game most players can only dream about. He drove the Los Angeles Kings crazy. Trottier skated over, around, and through the Kings' defense. He bagged three goals—a hat trick—and dished out two assists. The Islanders won big. Trottier's five points tied the team record. The fans fell in love with the rookie flash.

Trottier continued his hot play. Along the way he inspired the Islanders. He racked up impressive point totals. The Islanders started winning games.

The rookie center was amazing everyone.

"He makes things happen," said Islanders' general manager Bill Torrey during that rookie year. "He's solid. You can't knock him off the puck."

"The finesse he brings to the game is amazing," said defender Denis Potvin of his new teammate. "You can't learn it."

Bryan finished his rookie season in record-breaking form. He played in all 80 Islanders' games. He scored 32 goals. His 63 assists set an NHL rookie record. His 95 points also set the NHL rookie mark. No one was surprised when he was named Rookie of the Year in the NHL. With the honor came the Calder Trophy.

Trottier's hot season led the Islanders to their

best record in their four-year history: 42-21-17. Never before had so young a club played so well. New York fans began talking about a Stanley Cup for their Islanders. And Trottier was a big reason for all that talk.

But Trots slumped some during his second NHL season. He played in 76 games in 1976-77. His 30 goals and 42 assists totaled 72 points. That was a drop of 23 points from his rookie year.

Despite Trottier's slump the Islanders continued to improve as a team. A 47-21-12 record gave New York another second place finish. Things were looking up.

Trottier and the Islanders pulled it all together during the 1977-78 season. Coach Al Arbour put Bryan in the first team line with veteran Clark Gillies and rookie Mike Bossy on the wings. The new line clicked. The three players called Trio Grande started to score goals by the bucketful. And the Islanders kept on winning.

Bryan finished the 1977-78 season with 123 points, second best in the league. His 77 assists led the NHL. He also had 46 goals in his 77 games. Trottier made first team all-NHL at the end of the season.

The Islanders posted a fine 48-17-15 record in 1977-78. That was good enough for first place in the division. The Trio Grande had helped New York win its first title. But the Islanders again fell short in the playoffs.

The Islanders and the Trio Grande dominated

the NHL in 1978-79. Trottier, Bossy, and Gillies became the best line in NHL history. Together they scored a record 151 goals. With 200 assists thrown in, the Trio Grande scored a league record 351 points.

Trots accounted for 47 of the goals and 87 of the assists. The 87 assists was the fourth highest total in NHL history. His 134 points led the league in scoring. Naturally, Trottier made first team all-NHL. And just as naturally, Bryan received the Hart Trophy as the league's Most Valuable Player. In only his fourth season, Bryan Trottier became one of the greats in hockey history.

"I like to think he's a superstar," said teammate Bert Marshall. "He's everything you could ever hope to be."

Superstar Trottier set a handful of team records during that 1978-79 season. In four different games he dished out four assists. At one point he scored a goal or assist in 17 straight games. And in one game against the arch-rival New York Rangers he scored an incredible five goals and three assists! In the second period of that game he scored an NHL record, six points.

Not surprisingly, the Islanders had the best record in hockey during 1978-79. The team won 51 games against only 15 losses and 14 ties. The Islanders scored 358 goals in their 80 games—or nearly 4.5 goals per game.

The Islanders were heavily favored to win the Stanley Cup. But the New York Rangers re-

membered the trouncing they had suffered during the regular season. The Rangers shocked the hockey world by upsetting the Islanders. Once again the Islanders had failed to capture the Stanley Cup.

Trottier and his teammates slumped through much of the 1979-80 season. The Islanders finished with a ho-hum 39-28-13 record. That was their worst record in five years. But they still finished second in their division and made the playoffs.

Bryan scored 42 goals and 62 assists for 104 points. He failed to defend his scoring championship. He finished only fifth in the NHL in scoring. And he did not make any all-star teams.

No one expected much from the Islanders during the 1980 playoffs. Even a 3-1 first-round victory over Los Angeles stirred little interest.

New York crushed Boston, 4-1, in the next round of the playoffs. The Islanders met the Buffalo Sabres in the semifinals. The Sabres had finished the season with the second-best record in the league. But this time it was the Islanders' turn to surprise the fans. The Islanders won the series in six games. It was quite an upset.

The Islanders met the Philadelphia Flyers for the Stanley Cup. The Flyers had twice before won the Cup. The Islanders finally had a chance for their first Cup. New York didn't waste the opportunity. The Islanders crushed the Flyers in six games.

Trots was named Most Valuable Player in the playoffs. In 21 playoff games he scored an impressive 29 points. That total set another NHL record.

Trottier was a happy man after helping win the Stanley Cup. He has always enjoyed breaking records. And he loves the awards and honors constantly coming his way. But those aren't the things he wants to be remembered for.

"If there's anything I want to be remembered for, it's that I worked so hard when I played," he said. "I want people to watch someone play years from now and think, 'That guy plays as hard as Trottier used to.' "

Years from now they might also be calling Bryan Trottier one of the greatest players in the history of the game. He probably wouldn't mind them saying that, either.

GUY LAFLEUR
(Montreal Canadiens)

In hockey, as in all other sports, it is normal for members of your own team to cheer for you. But when members of the other team cheer for you, that means you're doing something special.

Guy Lafleur is that special player. "Lafleur" means "the flower" in French, so that is Guy's nickname. Over the last ten years he's been the greatest player in the National Hockey League. He's scored more goals, more assists, and more points than anyone else. He's won more NHL trophies and all-star awards than anyone else. And he's won more Stanley Cups than anyone else—except for his teammates.

One of those teammates is center Pierre Larouche. Larouche played for the Pittsburgh Penguins before coming to Montreal. He once admitted that he had been cheering for Lafleur while in a Pittsburgh uniform.

"They'd be ahead 6-1 and I'd be on the bench wishing he'd score more, just so I could watch and see how it is done," confessed Larouche. He is not alone in his admiration of Lafleur. The star right winger receives over 1,000 fan letters

a week. And he sees to it that every piece of mail is answered.

"No player in the game should be making more money than Lafleur," said an opposing player a couple of years back.

Lafleur got his start in his hometown of Thurso, Quebec. He was born on September 20, 1951. He started playing hockey at age five. At night he would fall asleep in his hockey uniform, arms wrapped around his hockey stick. He looked like a born hockey player.

Young Guy moved up to the Quebec Junior Aces when he was 15. The Aces played in the tough Quebec Junior Hockey League. Lafleur played in only eight games during the 1966-67 season. In 1967-68 he played in 43 games and scored a solid 49 points on 30 goals and 19 assists. Guy had a spectacular season in 1968-69. In 49 games he scored 50 goals. With his 60 assists he totaled 110 points for the season.

Lafleur was promoted to the famous Quebec Remparts for the 1969-70 season. He had another outstanding year. Guy scored an amazing 103 goals in just 56 games. Add in his 67 assists and he scored 170 points. He averaged three points a game on the season.

Lafleur did even better in his final junior season, 1970-71. He scored a league-leading 130 goals in only 62 games. That's better than two goals a game! With his 79 assists he led the league with 209 points.

Guy Lafleur finished his junior career as the

Guy Lafleur steals the puck.

UPI Photo

number one junior in all of Canada. Only Marcel Dionne of St. Catharine's even came close. Lafleur and Dionne were cinches to be the first two players chosen in the 1971 NHL draft.

Draft rights to Lafleur belonged to the California Golden Seals. That was because the Golden Seals had the worst record in the NHL the previous year. But the Canadiens wanted Lafleur to stay home and play with them in Montreal. The Canadiens swung a deal with the Seals. Montreal had the first pick in the 1971 draft—Guy Lafleur.

The pressure was on Lafleur right from the start. He was expected to be a star right away. He was supposed to follow in the footsteps of Henri Richard and Jean Beliveau and the other Montreal greats. The Flower was supposed to score goals and help the Canadiens win the Stanley Cup.

Lafleur played in 73 games during his 1971-72 rookie season. He scored 29 goals and had 35 assists for 64 points. That would normally be considered great for a rookie. But the Montreal fans expected more from Lafleur. The pressure got heavier. The Canadiens finished third in their division and lost out in the playoffs.

Guy's stats fell off some in 1972-73. In 69 games he scored 28 goals and 27 assists for 55 points. But he did help Montreal win the division and the Stanley Cup. He was part of the number one team in ice hockey.

The Canadiens failed to hold onto the Cup in

1973-74. And Lafleur had only a so-so year. In 73 games he managed only 21 goals and 35 assists for 56 points. Critics of the Canadiens got down on Lafleur. After three seasons he had not achieved the stardom that was expected of him.

But suddenly, during the 1974-75 season, the greatness in The Flower exploded into full bloom. In 70 games he scored 53 goals and 66 assists. That's more goals and assists than he scored in the previous two years put together! His 119 points put him near the top of the NHL scoring list.

Best yet, the Canadiens won back their division title. But once again they fell short in the Stanley Cup playoffs. The playoff loss was not due to Lafleur, however. He led all scorers in the playoffs with 12 goals.

Lafleur earned many individual honors after his first super season. He made first team all-NHL. He was named Most Valuable Player in his conference.

Guy Lafleur had finally lived up to expectations. What made the big difference in his fourth season?

"Confidence!" said his coach, Scotty Bowman. "That's the difference in Guy's game. His confidence is improved and now he's getting results. Last year he was getting good shots and making solid passes. But the puck wasn't going in. Now it's different. His shots are scoring and his passes are paying off."

"Now he's playing like his junior days," praised teammate Yvon Lambert. "He was the leader there and now he's the leader here. He's even great in practice."

Lafleur had his own explanation for the sudden return to greatness.

"First, I'm shooting better and quicker," he said. "When I get the puck, I shoot, and now it's going in. My new linemates help, too. It's great playing with Steve Shutt and Pete Mahovlich. They're super. I've learned a lot.

"I got hurt a couple of times during my first three years," added Lafleur. "I hesitated about going after the puck. That's a mistake. You can't wait. You have to go right away."

Lafleur had an even bigger season in the 1975-76. In 80 games he scored 56 goals and 69 assists. His 125 points led the NHL. Lafleur won his first scoring title and the Art Ross Trophy that went with it. He again made first team all-NHL.

Guy's scoring led Montreal to one of its best regular-season records ever. The Canadiens won an incredible 58 games against only 11 losses and 11 ties. Montreal easily won its division. The Canadiens readied for the playoffs. They wanted to return the Stanley Cup to Montreal after a two-year absence.

Then something spooky happened. Canadian police officials uncovered a plot to kidnap Lafleur. The kidnappers were planning on getting a huge ransom for his return. Lafleur and his

family were given police guards. Guy was given two choices. He could go to Miami and skip the playoffs. Or he could stay and play.

"I said I just wanted to play hockey," he recalled.

Guy Lafleur stayed and played. The Canadiens raced through the early playoff rounds. Montreal met the Philadelphia Flyers in the championship round.

The Canadiens won three straight from the defending champs. One more victory and Montreal could reclaim the Cup. The Flyers gave Montreal a tough battle in game four. The score was tied with only six minutes left. Philadelphia was fighting for its life. The Canadiens needed a perfect play. Enter Guy Lafleur.

"Pete Mahovlich passed to me from the corner, across the goal mouth," said Lafleur. "It happened too quick to even look where the goal was. I slapped at it and it went in."

Guy Lafleur later called that game-winning goal the biggest thrill of his hockey career. The Stanley Cup was back in Montreal. Lafleur became a national hero.

The Canadiens and Lafleur were absolutely incredible in that 1975-76 season. So all they did was perform even better in 1976-77.

The Flower played in all 80 games. He scored 56 goals and dished out a league-leading 80 assists. His 136 points again led the NHL and earned him the Art Ross Trophy. He made first team all-NHL for the third straight year. Guy

Lafleur was named the NHL's Most Valuable Player for the regular season.

Lafleur's play sparked Montreal to a 60-8-12 record during 1976-77. The 60 wins was the most ever by a Montreal club. The eight losses was the least for the team in over 30 years. And back then the team played many fewer games.

The Canadiens rambled through the playoffs and won their second straight Stanley Cup. Guy Lafleur was the top scorer in the playoffs. He scored 26 points on 9 goals and 17 assists. Lafleur was named Most Valuable Player (MVP) of the playoffs.

Lafleur set another record during the 1976-77 season. He scored at least one point in 28 straight games. No player had been that consistent before.

Guy did the impossible during the 1977-78 season. He won his third straight NHL scoring title and Art Ross Trophy. In 78 games he scored a league-leading 60 goals and 72 assists for 132 points. In the 66-year history of the Canadiens, Guy was the only player to win three scoring titles in a row. Only two other players in NHL history had managed that.

Guy managed his fourth straight berth on the NHL all-star first team. He earned his second straight NHL Most Valuable Player award. He led the Canadiens to a fine 59-10-11 record.

Lafleur was once again solid in the playoffs. He led in goals (10) and total points (21). With Guy's scoring punch the Canadiens skated to

their third straight Stanley Cup.

"Guy could have played any time, on any team," said Montreal vice-president Jean Beliveau after the 1977-78 season. Beliveau starred for the Canadiens in the 1960s. "His passing is beautiful. He is a deceptive skater. And he has the mark of all great scorers: he always shoots right on the net."

The Canadiens and their star right wing continued their great play into the 1978-79 season. In 80 games Lafleur banged in 52 goals and handed out 77 assists for 129 points. Guy finished third in the league in scoring. But he still grabbed his fifth straight all-NHL first team spot.

Montreal coasted through a 52-17-11 regular season. The Canadiens got to the playoff semi-finals before being challenged. There the Boston Bruins played Montreal to a standoff after six games. The Canadiens edged the Bruins in the seventh game. Many hockey fans called the series one of the greatest ever played. The Canadiens faced the New York Rangers in the finals. In five games Montreal knocked off the Rangers and won the Cup for the fourth year in a row. For the third straight year Lafleur led in playoff points, with 23.

During the 1979-80 season, the Canadiens fell to their worst record in seven years, 47-20-13. They were still good enough to win their division. But hopes for a fifth straight Stanley Cup died in the playoffs. The Minnesota North

Stars upset the Canadiens in the seventh game of their series.

Lafleur had another solid season in 1979-80. In 74 games he scored 50 goals and 75 assists. His 125 points was again third best in the NHL. But for the first time in six years Lafleur did not make any post-season all-star teams.

The Flower of Montreal has to prove himself once again during the 1980-81 season. He and the Canadiens want to regain their Stanley Cup form. Once again Guy Lafleur has expectations to live up to.

Pierre Larouche, for one, thinks Lafleur can meet any expectations of the people of Quebec province.

"He's as gentle as a flower, but plays like Superman," claims Guy Lafleur's teammate.

Lafleur may be a superstar—even a Superman—on the ice. But off the ice he's had other battles to fight. Take the English language, for example. Guy grew up speaking French. Professional hockey sent him to American cities where French was a *very* foreign language. Lafleur had a few problems.

"I remember going into a restaurant in Los Angeles and asking for a pair of toasts," Lafleur recalled with a laugh. "The waitress looked at me like I was crazy."

He may not get what he wants in restaurants. But Guy Lafleur gets what he wants on the ice.

BOBBY SMITH
(Minnesota North Stars)

In 1976 Bobby Smith almost tossed his hockey stick into the garbage can. He was 18 and at a crossroads in his life. He could begin an ice hockey career. Or he could go to college and study his other love, medicine.

He could have become Dr. Robert Smith.

Bobby still might become a doctor, someday. But for now the 6'4", 210-pound center directs plays for the Minnesota North Stars. Thanks to young Smith, the North Stars had their best season ever in 1979-80. And in the playoffs they upset the mighty Montreal Canadiens. Some hockey experts have called that upset the biggest in the history of the game.

Smith was born in North Sydney, Nova Scotia, on February 12, 1958. His family moved to Ottawa when Bobby was two years old. In Ottawa he learned hockey and played in all of the usual leagues. In the youth leagues he developed skating, puck-handling, and passing skills. Those skills later helped make him an NHL star.

Bobby signed with the Ottawa 67's for the

1975-76 junior league season. The 67's played in the Ontario Hockey Association. That first season in the OHA was tough for young Smith. In 62 games he managed only 24 goals and 34 assists. His 58 points didn't exactly tear up the league.

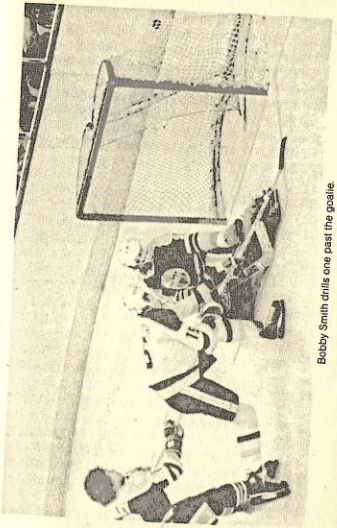
"In my first year of junior hockey I wasn't very productive at all," he recalled. "My second year was also my last year of high school. I figured that if I didn't have a good year I would be wasting my time by continuing."

Bobby put a lot of pressure on himself during that 1976-77 season. Hockey or medicine. A shot at the NHL or years in college. A short sports career or a long medical career.

The decision was simple for Bobby after that 1976-77 season. In 64 games he scored an amazing 65 goals to lead the OHA. With 70 assists he totaled 135 points. He was named second team all-OHA. Bobby decided to stick with hockey. School would always be there, later on.

Smith had a great season in 1977-78. In 61 games he scored 69 goals, which was really impressive. But he also handed out an incredible 123 assists. That means Bobby's passes set up an average of two goals per game. Smith's 192 points led the league and set the OHA record for points in a single season. Many hockey players don't score 192 points in their entire lives!

Naturally, Bobby was named first team all-



Bobby Smith drills one past the goalie.

UPI Photo

OHA. He was also awarded the league's highest honor. He received the Red Tilson Trophy as the league's Most Valuable Player.

Bobby Smith was everyone's pick as the best player in Canada in 1978. The Minnesota North Stars had the first choice in the annual NHL amateur draft. The North Stars had the number one pick because of a terrible 18-53-9 record in 1977-78. As expected, Minnesota's choice was Bobby Smith.

The North Stars were counting on Bobby's passing and puck-handling. The team expected the rookie to help turn the team around. The North Stars last had a winning record in 1972-73. People were already calling that "the good old days."

Bobby got off to a slow start during his 1978-79 rookie season. But the signs of stardom were still there. For a big man he moved smoothly and gracefully on the ice. He fought off checks easily. He also knocked more than a few of his opponents off the puck. Bobby's reach also impressed coaches and fans alike. The left-handed shooting center showed off a 37-inch reach, maybe the biggest in the NHL. His reach enabled Bobby to get at pucks before his opponents. He was also able to swing around the back of the goal and stuff the puck past the goalie. This jam shot became a crowd favorite. The fans looked for it every time Bobby skated behind the net.

About midway through the season, Bobby's

play really picked up. And the North Stars picked up with him. Minnesota finished with a 28-40-12 record. That may not sound like much. But the North Stars improved their record more than any other team in all the NHL. Minnesota missed the playoffs. But all of the signs were there. The team was on the way up.

Bobby played in all 80 games in his rookie year. His 244 shots led the team. His 30 goals, 44 assists, and 74 points also led the North Stars. Those stats led all NHL rookies during the 1978-79 season. The 74 points was a Minnesota rookie record.

The awards and honors poured in after that season. Minnesota fans named Bobby their Most Popular Player. The *Hockey News* named him NHL Rookie of the Year. So did the *Sporting News*. And so did the NHL itself. For that he received the Calder Trophy.

Bobby took all of the honors in stride.

"I am delighted," he said of the Rookie of the Year honors. "But I would trade it all for a finish in the playoffs.

"I came into this season knowing it would be a learning experience," he also said. "I didn't come into the NHL expecting to burn it up."

"Bobby Smith will be one of the NHL stars of the future," said Minnesota coach Glen Sonmor. "In his first year he was feeling his way around a bit. But he is obviously going to be a leader."

"Bobby Smith has the makings of a superstar," said then Montreal coach Scotty Bowman.

Smith didn't just sit around during the summer of 1979 and enjoy all that praise. He spoke—and spoke well—before clubs and youth groups. He played lots of tennis. And he took courses in chemistry and psychology at Ottawa University. Bobby hadn't forgotten the importance of an education. Nor had he forgotten his dream of a medical career.

The Minnesota North Stars began the 1979-80 season with a new confidence. Wingers Al MacAdam and Steve Payne started scoring goals in big numbers. Bobby improved his playmaking and passing skills. Only injuries kept Smith from a 100-point season. He played in 61 of the team's 80 games. He scored 27 goals and dished out a fine 56 assists, for 83 points. MacAdam and Payne each scored more than 40 goals. The North Stars finally had a solid offense.

Minnesota finished 1979-80 with a 36-28-16 record and 88 points. The point total was the best in the team's history. The North Stars finished third in their division. But they played in the toughest division in the NHL. Overall, Minnesota had the sixth-best record in the league. Not bad for a team that had won only 18 games two years earlier.

The North Stars won their first-round series in the playoffs. They were slated to meet the Montreal Canadiens in the quarterfinals. The Canadiens had won four straight Stanley Cup championships. A lot of people figured that

Montreal was a cinch to make it five straight. That didn't leave much room for the young North Stars.

The Minnesota players had other ideas. Smith and his mates figured that Montreal was just another hockey team.

The North Stars and Canadiens played about as even a series as anyone could have imagined. After six games, each team had won three. Game seven, in Montreal, proved to be just as close. The score was tied at 2-2 with time running out.

Bobby Smith set up a last-ditch rush down the ice. Minnesota wanted to avoid overtime since visiting teams seldom win an overtime game. Just over a minute remained in the match, and maybe the season. Smith spun a pass to MacAdam, who had set up behind the net. MacAdam turned and jammed a shot at the Montreal goalie. The puck snaked through. The Montreal fans couldn't believe it! The North Stars mobbed MacAdam and Smith. The Canadiens hung their heads. Minnesota won the game, 3-2. They had upset the awesome Canadiens.

The young North Stars suffered a letdown after the amazing upset of Montreal. The Philadelphia Flyers dominated their semifinal series. The Flyers beat Minnesota in five games. Philly went on to play for the Stanley Cup. The North Stars went home to savor the thrill of defeating the Canadiens. They also suffered the sadness

of losing to the Flyers. The Cup was so close!

"There's always next year," said loyal Minnesota fans after the loss to Philly. "There's always next year."

For the North Stars and Bobby Smith, next year is looking pretty good. So are many "next years" after that, for a long time to come.

DON EDWARDS
(Buffalo Sabres)

Truth is often stranger—and happier—than fiction. Ask Don Edwards. He'll tell you. His rise to stardom in the National Hockey League reads like the wildest tall tale. But it's really true.

The Buffalo Sabres were cruising through a fine season during 1976-77. Goalie Gerry Desjardins was playing excellent defense. Backup goaltender Al Smith had seen little action.

Then the disaster happened. Desjardins took a puck in the eye in a Thursday night game. He was finished for the season. The Sabres sent word to their Hershey farm team in the American Hockey League. On Friday Don Edwards was told to report to Buffalo. He was the new backup goalie.

Coach Floyd Smith then took a big chance. He decided to start the rookie in goal that Sunday against the Minnesota North Stars. Smith told Edwards the news on Sunday morning. Don had only a few hours to psych up for his first National Hockey League game. The pressure was intense.

The pressure soon got worse. Regular backup

Al Smith was upset to hear that the rookie would be in goal that day. So Smith, right on the spot, quit the Sabres. He packed up and walked out.

Suddenly Don Edwards was the only goaltender on the team!

Young Edwards took advantage of the opportunity. He swatted away 15 Minnesota shots in his debut. The Sabres romped, 6-2.

The next night the Sabres beat Toronto. And two nights later Edwards shut out the high-scoring Chicago Black Hawks.

Edwards had a 6-1 record after seven games in goal. He finished 1976-77 with a 16-7-2 record. Don Edwards had met the challenge. He had proven himself good enough.

Don Edwards became the top goaltender on the Buffalo Sabres. Desjardins never got his job back. Smith never returned to the team. Edwards was number one.

"I took flak from the players and the media at the time," said Sabres' general manager Punch Imlach. "But it was the right decision [to start Edwards]. They have to say so now. But they didn't then. Edwards has got lots of confidence in himself and is willing to go out and prove it to you. He proves it every game."

Edwards has been proving himself ever since he was a child. He even had to prove himself to his father. That's because his dad wouldn't let him play goalie until he was 13 years old.

"My father wouldn't let me in the goal until I proved I could skate," said Edwards. "He didn't

disapprove. He just knew the value of skating to a goalie."

The 5'9", 165-pound "mighty mite" was born on September 28, 1955. He played forward in youth hockey in his hometown of Hamilton, Ontario. At age 13 the left-hand shooting Edwards switched to goal. He spent the next few years sharpening his goaltending skills. Then he was ready for junior hockey.

Edwards played his junior hockey with the Kitchener Rangers. Kitchener played in the "A" level of the highly-rated Ontario Hockey Association. He played junior hockey against many of the current stars of the NHL.

The "Penguin" played goal in 35 games for the Rangers in 1973-74. He gave up only 95 goals. His three shutouts led the league. His 2.73 goals against average also led the league. He made first team all-star. He was awarded a trophy as the top goalie in the OHA.

The Rangers had a weaker defense in 1974-75. As a result Edwards gave up more goals, 256 in 55 games. And he only managed one shutout. His 4.70 goals against average was high. But he was still named a first team all-star.

Edwards was eligible for the 1975 National Hockey League draft. He wasn't exactly the highest-rated player in the whole draft. Buffalo didn't pick him up until the fifth round. Players grabbed in the fifth round seldom become superstars. That makes Edwards' success even more amazing.

Don Edwards tries to stop a goal.

UPI Photo

The Sabres sent Edwards to the Hershey Bears' farm team in the American Hockey League (AHL). He played 39 games in goal for Hershey during the 1975-76 season. He had three shutouts and a decent 3.41 goals against average. The Penguin was named a second team all-star in the AHL.

Edwards failed to make the Sabres at the start of the 1976-77 season. So once again he suited up for the Bears. Edwards quickly became the league's top goalie. In 47 games he had logged five shutouts. He had an impressive 2.91 goals against average. He was a shoo-in for first team all-star honors. There was a chance for league Most Valuable Player (MVP).

Then the Sabres called him up to Buffalo. He was no longer eligible for AHL honors. But that was OK with Edwards. His lifelong dream had been to play in the National Hockey League. The dream had finally come true.

Edwards scored two shutouts in 25 games in his rookie season. His 2.51 goals against average was the best by any goalie in Buffalo history. With a few more games he would have been among the best in the NHL.

Buffalo finished with a 48-24-8 record in Edwards' rookie season of 1976-77. Fans of the Sabres looked for an even better season in 1977-78.

The Sabres and Edwards let no one down. Buffalo skated to a 44-19-17 record and second place in the division. And Edwards was absolutely

great in goal. He played in 72 of Buffalo's 80 games. He scored five shutouts. His 2.64 average was sixth best in the league. Edwards made second team all-NHL.

"Right now I just can't get enough hockey," said Edwards during that 1977-78 season. He got plenty of hockey that year. Few goalies in NHL history have played in 72 games in a single season. He also received plenty of awards. Buffalo fans named him Most Popular of the Sabres. His teammates voted him their Most Valuable Player.

"Edwards has that certain something inside," said Buffalo coach Marcel Provonost. "It's something you can see in his every action. But it's also something you simply can't define, either."

Imlach, the manager who had earlier defended Edwards, later praised him. "The team's not going that well. Edwards is."

Edwards admitted that his confidence had improved after his first full NHL season.

"If you have confidence in yourself, you have the game beat," said Don. "It's that much easier to prove yourself if you believe in yourself. A goaltender has to prove to the guys in front of him that he can stop the biscuit. He has to know in his heart that he can."

At the same time, Edwards said he was still learning the craft of tending goal. A lot of his study time was spent in front of the TV, watching hockey games.

"It's how I learn," he said. "You watch. You

listen. You keep a mental book on players. I'm the best learner in the world."

Edwards didn't get a chance to practice all he had learned during the 1978-79 season. Injuries cut down on his net time. A wrist injury kept him out of the Stanley Cup playoffs. Buffalo didn't get very far without him. The Sabres finished the regular season in second place once again.

The Penguin played in 54 games during 1978-79. He managed two shutouts and a 3.02 average. The Sabres were 26-18-9 when Edwards played goal. Without Edwards the team had a 10-10-7 record. He made that much of a difference to the club.

A healthy Edwards played fewer games than ever before in 1979-80. Backup Bob Sauve played almost every other day. New coach Scotty Bowman's plan worked. With less net time and more rest, Edwards posted the best stats of his three full NHL seasons.

In 49 games Don picked up two shutouts and a 2.57 average. That average was third best in the NHL. Teammate Sauve actually led the NHL goalies. But Edwards played the tougher teams, the more important games. Don received his second nomination to the all-NHL second team.

Together Edwards and Sauve allowed the least number of goals of any netminders in the NHL. For their efforts they received the Vezina Trophy. The Vezina is one of the most highly-valued trophies in the NHL. The team winning the Vezina each year can claim the best defense

and best goaltenders in all of hockey.

The play of Edwards and Sauve led the Sabres to a 47-17-16 record. This was the best Buffalo record in history. The Sabres edged Boston for the division title. Buffalo entered the playoffs ranked second. The Sabres were a respected team by the end of the season.

Buffalo also earned world-wide respect in a game that didn't even count in the standings. In January 1980, the Sabres played the famous Red Army team of the Soviet Union. With Edwards in goal the Sabres skated to an impressive 6-1 victory. Buffalo handed Red Army its worst loss *ever* in international play.

Despite the regular season success, Buffalo faltered again in the 1980 playoffs. The Sabres fell to the New York Islanders, 4-2, in the semifinals. The Islanders went on to win the Stanley Cup.

The Penguin celebrated his 25th birthday just before the start of the 1980-81 season. The young goaltender was already a star in the NHL. He was better than most at stopping the speeding puck. Somehow his tiny 5'9" body blocked off shot after shot. But even after years of doing it well, Edwards admitted that playing goal can be scary.

"All NHL goalies have fear," he said. "You know the puck can hurt you. But you have to get a kind of killer instinct. You don't want anyone to beat you. And you'll do anything imaginable to stop them. If it takes your head, you'll stop it with

your head."

The truth is that Don Edwards loves playing goal in the National Hockey League. He might have found success in a strange way. But at least he found it.

"If I had my choice of being anything in the world I wanted to be, I'm it right now," said Edwards. "I love to play goal and look forward to every game."

MARCEL DIONNE
(Los Angeles Kings)

The 1979-80 National Hockey League scoring title went to tiny Marcel Dionne, by a nose.

Really, it *was* by a nose.

Dionne scored one of his league-leading 53 goals with his nose. Scoring the goal hurt. Seven stitches were needed to repair the damage. But that goal made all the difference. Dionne scored 137 points. So did Wayne Gretzky of Edmonton. Dionne scored 53 goals, two more than Gretzky, so Dionne won the title. Take away the "nose goal" and Dionne loses the scoring title by one point.

Marcel received the Art Ross Trophy for winning the scoring title. He was also named to the NHL all-star first team. And the *Sporting News* named him as the NHL's Most Valuable Player. After ten years of scoring goals for losing teams, Marcel Dionne had finally become a superstar.

The 5'7½" center was born in Drummondville, Quebec, on August 3, 1951. His mother strapped a pair of skates to his feet before little Marcel was three years old. His dad built a rink in the

backyard for his son's training. Marcel was a fine skater by the time he made it to the Pee Wee League in Quebec.

The Montreal Canadiens took notice of young Dionne even then. The Canadiens sent a letter to Marcel's parents. The Canadiens asked the Dionnes to take good care of their son. The Canadiens wanted Marcel centering for them someday. The letter was a big thrill for Marcel even though he never ended up with the Canadiens.

Marcel starred in Pee Wee and Bantam hockey in Quebec. By his mid-teens he had a strong following among local hockey fans. When Marcel chose to travel to Ontario for his junior hockey a lot of those fans became angry. They switched their favor to Guy Lafleur, then a junior with the Quebec Remparts. This began a rivalry between Dionne and Lafleur. That rivalry is still going on.

Dionne played his junior hockey with the St. Catharine's Black Hawks of the Ontario Hockey Association. In his first year with the Hawks, 1968-69, he scored an even 100 points on 37 goals and 63 assists.

In 1969-70 Marcel led the OHA in scoring with 132 points. He also led in goals with 55 (in only 54 games) and in assists with 77. Despite these stats, he made only second team all-star.

Dionne did even better in 1970-71, his final junior season. He scored 62 goals in only 46 games. With his 81 assists he scored a league-leading 143 points. And this time he was named

first team all-star.

St. Catharine's and the Quebec Remparts were the two best junior hockey clubs in Canada in 1971. Dionne and Lafleur were the two best junior players. A playoff series was scheduled between the two teams. This series became a headline event in Quebec and Ontario. But the fans took the series too seriously. Riots threatened. The series was cancelled. Lafleur and Dionne never had a serious battle on the ice.

But the two players did have a kind of battle in the 1971 NHL draft. The Montreal Canadiens had the first pick. They took Lafleur. The Detroit Red Wings had the second pick. They took Dionne. Once again Dionne and Lafleur were the two best.

Detroit had a miserable record in 1971-72. But Dionne had an excellent rookie season. He scored 28 goals and handed out 49 assists. The 77 points was an NHL rookie record. The record stood for four years.

The Red Wings never climbed above fourth place in Dionne's four seasons in Detroit. Dionne never made it to the Stanley Cup playoffs. But he did continue to play good hockey and score lots of points.

Marcel had 90 points in his second season on 40 goals and 50 assists. He fell to 78 points in 1973-74. Dionne had an excellent year for Detroit in 1974-75. He played in all 80 games. He scored 47 goals and grabbed 74 assists. His 121 points was third best in the NHL. He

Marcel Dionne drives the puck past the goalie.

UPI Photo

also set an NHL record by scoring ten short-handed goals during the season. Dionne only received 14 minutes in penalties during the entire season. For his sportsmanship and excellent play he received the Lady Byng Trophy. The Byng is prized by all hockey players.

After his first four NHL seasons Marcel Dionne had scored 366 points. That was the most points ever scored by any player in NHL history. But Dionne was unhappy in Detroit. He was tired of losing. He wanted a slot in the playoffs. He wanted a shot at the Stanley Cup. So he played out his option with the Red Wings. He signed with the Los Angeles Kings during the summer of 1975.

Dionne started his Los Angeles career with a bang. In 1975-76 he set Kings' records in goals (40) and points (94). Better yet, the Kings finished second in their division and made it to the playoffs.

Dionne continued setting Kings' records in 1976-77. He scored a team record 53 goals and a team record 122 points. He also continued his clean play and won his second Lady Byng award. The Kings once again finished second and made the playoffs.

Marcel and the Kings had an off year in 1977-78. A bad shoulder limited Dionne's play for parts of the season. He fell to 79 points and the Kings fell to third place.

The Kings started slowly in 1978-79. About halfway through the season things began to

click for Dionne and his mates. One big reason was the fine play of Dionne's line. Wings Charlie Simmer and Dave Taylor blended perfectly with Marcel's center play. In the last 38 games of the season this combination led the NHL in scoring with 169 points. The Kings finished third again, but things were looking up.

With the help of Simmer and Taylor, 1978-79 was Dionne's biggest in the NHL. In 80 games he scored 59 goals and gave out 71 assists for a personal high of 130 points. He finished second in scoring to Bryan Trottier of the Islanders. And he finally made an all-star second team in the NHL.

"Little Beaver" was finally being noticed by hockey fans. Big things were expected of Dionne during the 1979-80 season. He didn't plan on disappointing anyone. "One of my goals is to prove I'm a winner, as Lafleur has," said Marcel.

The Kings got off to a blazing start in 1979-80. After thirteen games Dionne, Taylor, and Simmer were the top three scorers in the NHL. At one point in the season they averaged 2.9 goals and 6.2 points per game. That makes for winning ice hockey.

"Marcel's probably the best team player we have," said linemate Taylor during 1979-80. "He's always trying to motivate the players and get them going. Like, in the dressing room, he gets himself all charged up. And then he starts talking and he gets everybody else charged up."

"As many goals as Marcel scores, he is *the* most unselfish hockey player I've ever seen around the net," said the Kings' coach Bob Berry.

The Kings settled down to a below .500 season in 1979-80, but still they finished second in their division. The Kings were clubbed by the Islanders, 3-1, in the playoffs. The Islanders went on to win the Stanley Cup.

The unselfish Dionne had an incredible season, however. He scored a league-high 53 goals. He handed out an amazing 84 assists. His 137 points led the NHL. He won the Art Ross Trophy. He made first team all-NHL. He won the *Sporting News* MVP. After ten years of being a nice guy and losing, Marcel Dionne was still a nice guy. And a winner.

In the summer of 1980, Marcel signed a new contract with the Kings. The six-year contract was worth nearly $3.5 million. That made Dionne the highest-paid player in NHL history.

The money was important to Dionne. So was the scoring title. But his big goal in the NHL remained to play with a Stanley Cup contender. Dionne said that Kings' owner Jerry Buss wanted the same thing.

"He's shown me he wants to build a winner and he wants me to be a part of it," said Dionne. "At this stage of my career, I'd like nothing more than to give him the winner he wants."

Despite the big money, Dionne insists he's in hockey for the love of the game. That might

explain scoring goals with his nose.

"I'd play this game for nothing," he once said. "And the day I don't feel that way I'll hang up my skates."

Dionne couldn't hang up his skates if the hook were too high on the wall. His official height is listed at 5'9". But he is really closer to 5'7½". Marcel used to be sensitive about his size. But now, with an NHL scoring title under his belt, he can joke about his height.

"I'm not little, either," he jokes. "I'm stubby, not little."

Champions can afford to laugh at themselves.

MIKE BOSSY
(New York Islanders)

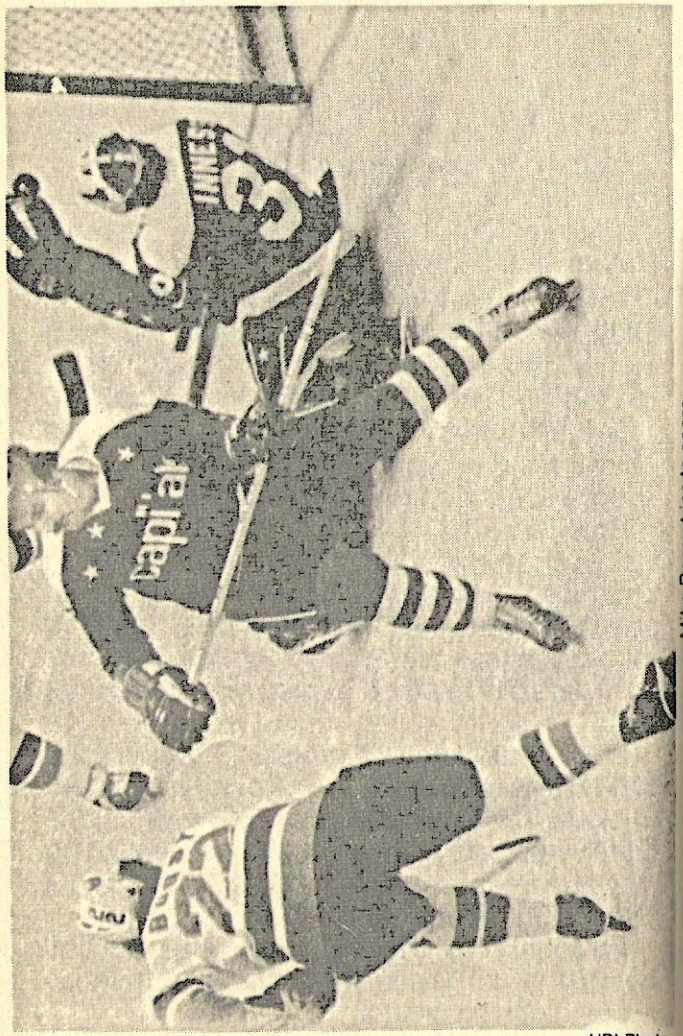
The people in Montreal love their ice hockey. They love to tell stories about incredible feats on the ice. A favorite story is about the six-year-old kid who scored 21 goals—in one game.

The story is true. The six-year-old kid was Mike Bossy. And young Bossy has been scoring goals in big numbers ever since then.

Bossy finished only his third NHL season in 1979-80. In those three years he scored an amazing 173 goals. No player in history scored so many goals so quickly. And "Boss" capped off his third season by helping the once-lowly Islanders to their first Stanley Cup championship.

Bossy was born in Montreal on January 22, 1957. He was one of ten children. Mike learned to skate in his own backyard. Every winter his father watered down the snow to make a skating rink. The Bossy clan alone could field a couple of ice hockey teams.

At age six, Mike signed up with his first hockey team. That's when he scored those amazing 21 goals in a single game.



Mike Bossy tries to score.

UPI Photo

In the years to come Bossy proved that the 21-goal game was no accident. During one Pee Wee League season he scored 170 goals in just 40 games.

Mike played his junior hockey with Laval National of the Quebec Junior Hockey League (QJHL). In four seasons with Laval he scored 309 goals. Only Guy Lafleur scored more goals in QJHL history.

Bossy averaged over a goal per game during his junior career. He had 70 goals and 118 points in 1973-74. The next year he scored 149 points thanks to a league-leading 84 goals. In 1975-76 the right wing scored 79 goals and 136 points. He capped off his junior career with 75 goals and 126 points in 1976-77. Boss also received the Most Gentlemanly Player award that season.

Mike was eligible for the 1977 NHL draft. Normally a goal-scorer like Bossy would be among the first two or three players selected. But Bossy had a bad mark on his record. The scouts said he couldn't play defense. They said he wasn't a hitter, that he wouldn't throw a check on an opponent.

"The report said he couldn't check his suitcase," joked Islanders' coach Al Arbour.

As a result, 14 teams passed over Bossy during the draft. Five right wings were picked before he was. Even hometown Montreal didn't take a chance on Bossy. Finally the New York Islanders made Mike the 15th player chosen in

the 1977 draft.

"It hurt my pride to go only 15th in the draft," he said later. But he also admitted, "I was lazy on defense in the juniors. The coaches never stressed defense as much as offense . . . I've been working on my checking."

Islanders' general manager Bill Torrey said his team was willing to take a chance with Bossy. "We thought we had a good enough defense that Bossy could help us by developing as a pure offensive player," said Torrey.

Montreal coach Scott Bowman agreed. He also lamented his club's failure to pick up on Bossy. "There's no way he should have escaped us, especially when he was picked so low," said Bowman. "You can't teach a kid—any kid—how to score goals. But you can teach him how to cover his wing on defense."

The 6', 186-pound winger was an instant hit in the NHL. He scored 6 goals in his first 11 games with the Islanders. Then he *really* got hot. He knocked in 14 goals in his next 11 games.

Coach Arbour had teamed Bossy with up-and-coming center Bryan Trottier and veteran left wing Clark Gillies. The new line clicked instantly. After 25 games the three players called Trio Grande had 48 goals. That was 11 more goals than any other NHL line. Twenty of those goals belonged to Bossy.

The Islanders rambled to a 48-17-15 record behind the scoring of the Trio Grande. That was

good enough for the division title. But New York was blasted from the 1977-78 playoffs by Toronto in a rough seven-game series.

Mike played 73 games during his first NHL season. He scored 53 goals and 38 assists for 91 points. He was sixth in the NHL in scoring. The 53 goals was a record for an NHL rookie. The old record was 44. Bossy made all-NHL second team behind Guy Lafleur. And he received the Calder Trophy as the NHL Rookie of the Year.

Suddenly everyone wanted to know about this rookie sensation. How did he score so many goals?

"It's a Godsent power," answered Bossy. "Three-fourths of the time I don't even see where I'm shooting. There really is no secret. I try to position myself before I actually get the puck and then get the shot away as quickly as I can."

"His main strength is that he's exceptionally quick and accurate," said Arbour, his coach. "He's the quickest I've ever seen at getting a shot off."

"I know that to have success in this league I will have to shoot quickly," said Bossy. "It's something I've always tried to work on. It's something I was taught to do. People ask me if I was surprised to score 53 goals my first year. Yes and no. I was surprised at the time. But after the season was over I looked back on it. And I wasn't surprised at all, remembering all the

chances I had. I usually have five or six shots a game, and if I don't score, it's my fault."

But Bossy continued to score consistently in his second NHL season. He scored his 100th NHL goal in his 129th game. That was five games faster than any player in NHL history.

The Trio Grande also continued to tear up the league. The Bossy-Trottier-Gillies line was the best in hockey. The trio chased every league scoring record.

"They're so good, it's almost like they're toying with you," said Montreal coach Scotty Bowman.

Chicago veteran Stan Mikita said there was only one good defense against Bossy and his mates: "You just pray a lot."

By the end of the 1978-79 season, the Trio Grande had scored a league record 151 goals. With 200 assists the Islanders' first line totaled 351 points. No line before had scored so many points.

Bossy finished his second season with 69 goals and 57 assists for 126 points. He finished second in the NHL in scoring, behind linemate Trottier. His 69 goals was the second highest single-season total in NHL history. Phil Esposito scored 76 in 1970-71.

Mike scored goals in ten straight games at one point in the season. Only two others have ever done that. And Bossy led the league in power play goals with 27.

On top of all that, Mike showed that he was learning how to play defense. In one game he

threw himself in front of the net and blocked the puck with his body. "I must have been crazy," he joked after the game. But he was also a little proud.

The Islanders finished the 1978-79 season with the league's best record: 51-15-14. Bossy and his mates made it to the semifinal round of the playoffs. There they were beaten in six games by their crosstown enemies, the New York Rangers.

Once again Bossy made second team all-NHL behind Guy Lafleur. A lot of people thought Bossy should have gotten first team because of all those goals.

"People try to compare me with Guy Lafleur," said Bossy. "I'll never try to do that. He's a spectacular player. I'm not."

Mike signed a spectacular contract before the 1979-80 season. The Islanders agreed to pay the right wing a lot of money to keep him around for a lot of years.

Fans of the Islanders were pleased. They expected their team to challenge for the Stanley Cup. And they knew that Bossy was one of the team's biggest weapons.

But Bossy and his teammates never really got going during the 1979-80 regular season. The team's 39-28-13 record was its worst in several years. And Bossy had his slowest goal-scoring season as a pro. He scored 51 goals and 41 assists for 92 points. He did not make any of the post-season all-star teams. Later the

critics would call the Islanders "a bunch of sleeping giants."

New York came alive during the playoffs. They ripped Los Angeles in four games. They trounced Boston in just five. They upset the highly-rated Buffalo Sabres in six games. Suddenly the Islanders found themselves in the Stanley Cup finals against the Philadelphia Flyers.

The Flyers and Islanders played tough hockey for the first five games. But New York emerged with a 3-2 lead. Game six was played in New York. The Islanders wanted to win it badly. A loss would send the series to Philadelphia for a deciding seventh game.

The Islanders blew a big lead in game six. The Flyers tied the game at 4-4 after regulation time. That meant overtime. The game would end with the first goal.

"When we went back there for overtime, we knew what we had to do," said Bossy. "That's all."

Seven minutes later Bob Nystrom knocked in a perfect goal. The Islanders won the game and the Stanley Cup. Bossy had reached the top of the mountain in his third pro season.

Bossy entered the 1980-81 season ready to add to his record 173-goal total. At this rate Bossy could reach the 500-goal milestone earlier than any player in NHL history. He may someday be known as the game's greatest goal scorer.

"I just love to score," he says. "I'm always disappointed when I don't score, whether we win or lose, whether I have ten shots on goal or none. I like to score goals. The team comes first, and if the team wins, I'm happy. But I'm still disappointed if I don't score a goal. There's just something in me that's that way.

"I just love to score."

MARK HOWE
(Hartford Whalers)

An incredible thing happened in the fall of 1973 in Houston, Texas. Sports history was made by a trio of hockey players named Howe.

The Houston Aeros opened the 1973-74 WHA season with all-time NHL superstar Gordie Howe at right wing. Gordie had come out of retirement to play with the Aeros. One reason for Gordie's return to the ice was the man playing at left wing. That was son Mark. The other reason was the man playing on defense. That was son Marty. Gordie Howe had fulfilled a lifelong dream. He had played professional hockey on the same team with his sons.

The Howes played together for four years in Houston. Then the trio played for two seasons with the New England Whalers and one with the renamed Hartford Whalers.

Gordie Howe retired after the 1979-80 season. He was 52 years old. He left behind a trail of records which may never be touched. He also left behind a pair of hockey-playing sons. And one of those sons, Mark, was following in his dad's all-star footsteps. Mark was named second

team all-NHL after the 1979-80 season.

Mark Howe was no longer just Gordie Howe's son. Mark Howe was a star in his own right.

Mark was born in Detroit, Michigan, on May 28, 1955. He learned to skate at age three. He had no idea then that his teacher was one of the greatest hockey players of all time.

"When I was three years old, Dad took Marty and me down to the rink," recalled Mark. "At first I held onto a chair in the middle of the ice. But soon I learned to skate pretty well on my own. I started in leagues when I was five. By nine I was playing 70 games a year. I've always wanted to play hockey."

And so hockey became young Mark Howe's life.

"I just spent so much time on hockey when I was growing up," he said. "Dad told me to watch the players instead of the puck. He told me to watch the way they moved and checked. That helped more than anything else. That, and working out on my own. Sometimes I would skate for two or three hours all alone. Or I would shoot goals in the backyard nets I had made in shop class, using sticks I had made, too. Everything was hockey."

Growing up as Gordie Howe's son provided some added thrills for Mark.

"Sure, there was a little added pressure," admitted Mark. "But it also helped us get ice time with pro teams. I worked out with the Red Wings [Gordie's team] many summers. I learned

things at 14 some kids never learn. If it had to do with hockey, I was there."

Mark's biggest hockey thrill of them all took place because of his father.

"That was when my dad scored his 544th and 545th goals in the mid-1960s," said Mark. "He tied and then went ahead of Rocket Richard's career goals record. I was only eight or nine years old. I got chills when my dad got standing ovations both times. One of them lasted twenty minutes.

"The only bigger thrill would be to win the Stanley Cup."

Mark's mother also played a large part in the hockey lives of Mark and Marty. Once she started a league so her boys would have a place to play. Another time she drove over 25,000 miles in a single season taking her boys to and from practices and games.

In 1970 Mark began his career in junior hockey. He played with the Detroit Junior Wings. The Wings played in the Southern Ontario Junior Hockey Association (SOJHA).

Young Howe had an amazing first season in junior hockey. He played in 44 games during that 1970-71 season. He scored 37 goals and a league-leading 70 assists. His 107 points also led the league. He made first team all-SOJHA and was named the league's Most Valuable Player.

"That fast start was important to me," said Howe. "The Detroit team had only Americans

on it. All the other teams in the league were Canadian. We were supposed to finish last. So we really had something to prove. We finished second during the season and then won the playoffs. We surprised everyone."

Mark missed most of the 1971-72 season because of knee surgery. He played in only nine games with the Wings. He had five goals and nine assists for 14 points.

Early in 1972 Mark joined the US Olympic hockey team. The Americans surprised the world by winning the silver medal.

"I only played maybe five minutes a game," said Howe. "We had a good, experienced team."

Mark spent the 1972-73 season with the Toronto Marlboros. Toronto played in the "A" division of the Ontario Hockey Association. In 60 games Howe scored 38 goals and 66 assists for 104 points. During the playoffs he led all scorers with 26 points.

In June 1973, Mark signed with the Houston Aeros of the World Hockey Association. There he joined his father and brother. Mark Howe had just turned 18.

"It was a good opportunity for a young player," said Mark. "The money was good, too. I knew I would go pro anyway, so I went with Houston."

The Aeros had a fine record in the 1973-74 WHA season. Houston won the division title. The Aeros then swept through the playoffs to win the Avco Cup. Mark's first pro season was quite successful. He played in 76 games, scoring

UPI Photo

Gordie Howe passes the puck to his son Mark.

38 goals and 41 assists for 79 points. Mark made all-WHA second team. He was named the league's Rookie of the Year. His dad was named the league's Most Valuable Player.

Mark was drafted by the Boston Bruins in the second round of the 1974 NHL draft. Mark said "no" to Boston and the NHL. He had his home with his father and brother in Houston.

The Aeros dominated the WHA again in 1974-75. Houston again won its division and the Avco Cup. In 74 games Mark scored 36 goals and 40 assists for 76 points. During the playoffs he led the league in goals (10) and points (22).

Houston won the division title again in 1975-76. But the Aeros failed to defend the Cup during the playoffs. Mark had another solid season. In 72 games he knocked in 39 goals and handed out 37 assists for 76 points.

The Aeros won another division title in 1976-77. And Mark made second team all-WHA. He scored 75 points in 57 games on 23 goals and 52 assists.

The Howes all played out their options with the Aeros after the 1976-77 season. In June 1977, Gordie, Mark, and Marty signed with the New England Whalers of the WHA.

Mark played defense as well as wing with the Whalers. He got more ice time than ever before during the 1977-78 season. In 70 games he scored 30 goals and dished out 61 assists. His 91 points was tenth best in the WHA. The Whalers took second place in the division, but

fell short in the playoffs.

Mark had his best pro seson in 1978-79. In 77 games he bagged 42 goals and gave out an impressive 65 assists. His 107 points was fourth best in the WHA. After the season Mark made first team all-WHA at left wing. The Whalers slumped to fourth place in that final WHA season.

The World Hockey Association folded after that 1978-79 season. The four strongest WHA teams moved over to the NHL. The Whalers was one of those teams. The team name was changed from the New England Whalers to the Hartford Whalers. And the Hartford Whalers were part of the NHL for the 1979-80 season.

The 5'11", 180-pound Howe became mostly a defensive player in the 1979-80 season. In 77 games he scored 24 goals and 56 assists for 80 points. Mark made second team all-NHL defender in his first season in the league. Hartford posted a 27-34-19 record in its first NHL season. The Whalers finished in fourth place in the division. But the team did make the playoffs ahead of older, more established NHL clubs.

"People are starting to judge me on my own merits," said Howe before the 1980-81 season. "People wondered about my ability in the WHA because they thought the league wasn't as good as the NHL. But I think this last year in the NHL helped. I was in awe the first couple of weeks. Then I realized these guys were pretty much the same."

Like the retired Bobby Orr, Howe is getting a reputation as a defender who likes to attack on offense.

"I'm quicker than some of the other defenders," said Mark. "That way I get an extra stride coming back to cover my area. I also skate backwards well, better than most, maybe. I also get more ice time on defense, which I like. You can control more of the play."

Mark Howe has the same career goal as most other NHL players.

"Winning the Stanley Cup is my biggest goal," he admits. "We won the WHA Cup my first two years in Houston. The Cup is every hockey player's goal."

But unlike his father, Mark doesn't think he can play on into his 50s.

"I don't think I could do it," said Howe. "I just hope to continue to play well and keep going until it's time to quit. I don't have the strength and endurance of a Gordie Howe. No one does. The travel and the long season is just too tough."

Mark spends a lot of time with the young people of the Hartford, Connecticut area. His advice to them is the same advice he gives himself. Mark is still a couple of credits short of his high school diploma. But he intends to get the diploma someday.

"Don't give up on your education, even to play hockey," Mark says to his young fans. "College hockey is getting bigger and better. If

you go to college you have something to fall back on after hockey. Other than that, enjoy your hockey and work at it. My parents always told us to do the best we could all the time."

BARRY BECK
(New York Rangers)

The Philadelphia Flyers will never forget Barry Beck. The young defender bullied the one-time "Broad Street Bullies" during the 1980 playoffs. In one game Beck knocked out two of the Flyers. No one accused Beck of cheap shots. The knockouts came on clean body checks.

The Flyers finally defeated the Rangers in their playoff series. But the Flyers long remembered the hard-hitting Beck. Some say that Philly was so battered from the series that the Islanders had it easy in the Stanley Cup finals. Blame Barry Beck for that.

The 6'3", 215-pound Beck plays defense the old-fashioned way. He makes opponents pay the price for entering his zone. Sure, he gets a lot of penalty minutes. But he also helps his team win hockey games.

"I've always preferred to be a defensive defenseman," said Beck. "My job is to prevent goals, not score them. The good teams always have the lowest goals against average. When I have to, I carry the puck. And when I see an opening in the offensive zone, I take it. But I'm

not someone who likes to rush the puck all the time."

Much of the young star's toughness comes from growing up "on the wrong side of the tracks." He was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, on June 3, 1957.

"I came from a fairly tough neighborhood in Vancouver and got in some trouble as a teenager," said Beck. "Nothing serious, but enough so that I knew what I didn't want to happen in my life."

Beck devoted himself to sports as a youngster. He played in all of the usual youth hockey leagues. In high school he played football. His hero was Dick Butkus. Butkus was then a tough linebacker with the Chicago Bears.

"Bubba" Beck played his first junior league season in 1973-74. He played with Langley in an "A" division of the British Columbia Hockey League. In 63 games he scored 8 goals and 28 assists for 36 points. He also got 329 penalty minutes. That's an average of five minutes in every game. Beck was already getting a reputation as an "enforcer" on the ice.

Late in the 1973-74 season Beck was promoted to the Kamloops Chiefs of the Western Canada Hockey League (WCHL). He played one game for the Chiefs.

Beck stayed in the WCHL for the 1974-75 season. He played 58 games for the New Westminster Bruins. He scored 9 goals and 33 assists for 42 points. And he held himself down

to 162 minutes in penalties. That was less than three minutes a game.

Bubba developed into a star player in the 1975-76 season with the Bruins. In 68 games he had 19 goals and an impressive 80 assists for 99 points total. He did have some penalty trouble again. He drew 325 minutes worth. That was nearly five minutes per game again. Beck was named first team all-WCHL at the end of the season.

Beck became the best player in western Canada during the 1976-77 season with the Bruins. In 61 games he scored 16 goals and 46 assists for 62 points. He calmed himself down to only 167 penalty minutes. Beck led New Westminster to Canada's Memorial Cup championship. That meant the Bruins were the best juniors in all of Canada.

The WCHL heaped honors on Beck at the end of the season. He made first team all-WCHL. He was named the league's Best Defenseman. To top it off, the defensive star was named the league's Most Valuable Player.

Barry was the second player chosen in the 1977 NHL amateur draft. The Colorado Rockies signed the huge defender.

Beck was an instant success during the 1977-78 NHL season. He scored more goals and more assists early on than any rookie defender in history. By mid-season Beck was scoring at a record-breaking pace. Beck became so good so quickly that other teams tried to

New York Rangers Photo

Defensive star Barry Beck.

trade for him. The Toronto Maple Leafs offered Colorado a million dollars for the rookie. Colorado turned down the deal.

"He's an all-star already," said Colorado general manager Ray Miron. "And he still hasn't begun to realize how good he is. There never was any doubt about drafting him. And there's no doubt now that we made the right decision."

Beck played in 75 games during his rookie season. His 22 goals set an NHL record for rookie defensemen. He also handed out 38 assists. Beck's 60 points set another rookie NHL record. He ended up as the number two scorer on the Rockies team. Colorado finished second in its division despite a poor 19-40-21 record. The Rockies lost out in the first round of the playoffs.

The Rockies fell to a terrible 15-53-12 record in 1978-79. They didn't come close to a playoff spot. Beck's stats also fell off some. In 63 games he scored 14 goals and 28 assists for 42 points.

Beck started the 1979-80 season with the Rockies. In ten games he scored one goal and five assists for six points.

Then, in a surprise move, the Rockies traded Beck to the New York Rangers. In exchange the Rockies received Pat Hickey, Lucien Deblois, Mike McEwen, and Dean Turner. The Rangers had traded four players for the one defensive star. Long-time Ranger fans couldn't remember a bigger trade by the club.

Those New York fans got a treat during Beck's first home game with the Rangers. The big defender jammed home a goal that turned out to be the game-winner. In the process he crashed his chest against the cross-bar of the goal. Beck and the cross-bar went flying.

Bubba had a fine season with the Rangers. In 61 games he scored 14 goals and a team-high 45 assists. His 59 points was fourth highest on the club. Beck helped New York to a 38-32-10 record and third place in the division. The Rangers survived one playoff round before being knocked out by the Flyers. Aside from flooring a couple of the Flyers, Beck had one goal and four assists in nine playoff games.

At the end of the season the third-year player was named second team all-NHL. Barry Beck was on his way to stardom.

But the young star did not forget his roots. He remembered the tough growing-up years on the streets of Vancouver. He now brings that street knowledge to rap sessions with teenagers. He talks with the teens about drugs. And about hockey. And about how the two don't mix. For some reason the teens listen to the big guy. That's because he's been there. He knows what he's talking about.

BOBBY CLARKE
(Philadelphia Flyers)

Flin Flon, Manitoba, is about the closest place to "nowhere" you'll ever want to find. Flin Flon is almost as close to the North Pole as it is to the United States. A temperature of zero degrees would make for a warm winter day.

About the only thing Flin Flon is good for is mining. Rich deposits of gold, copper, and zinc lie beneath the city. Most of the people who live in Flin Flon work in those mines.

The only way out is ice hockey.

"In Flin Flon you either play hockey or you work in the mines," said Bobby Clarke. "There's no way I wanted to work in those mines."

So he played ice hockey. He played every minute he was out of school. If school got in the way of hockey, he skipped school. If he got caught skipping or caused trouble in class, he would be sent home. "Home" was a pair of skates and a skating rink.

"As a kid, my only ambition was to make the NHL," he said.

Bobby Clarke fulfilled his ambition. During the 1970s he became one of the brightest—and

roughest—stars in the National Hockey League. Twice he led his Philadelphia Flyers to the Stanley Cup championship. Three times he was named the league's Most Valuable Player.

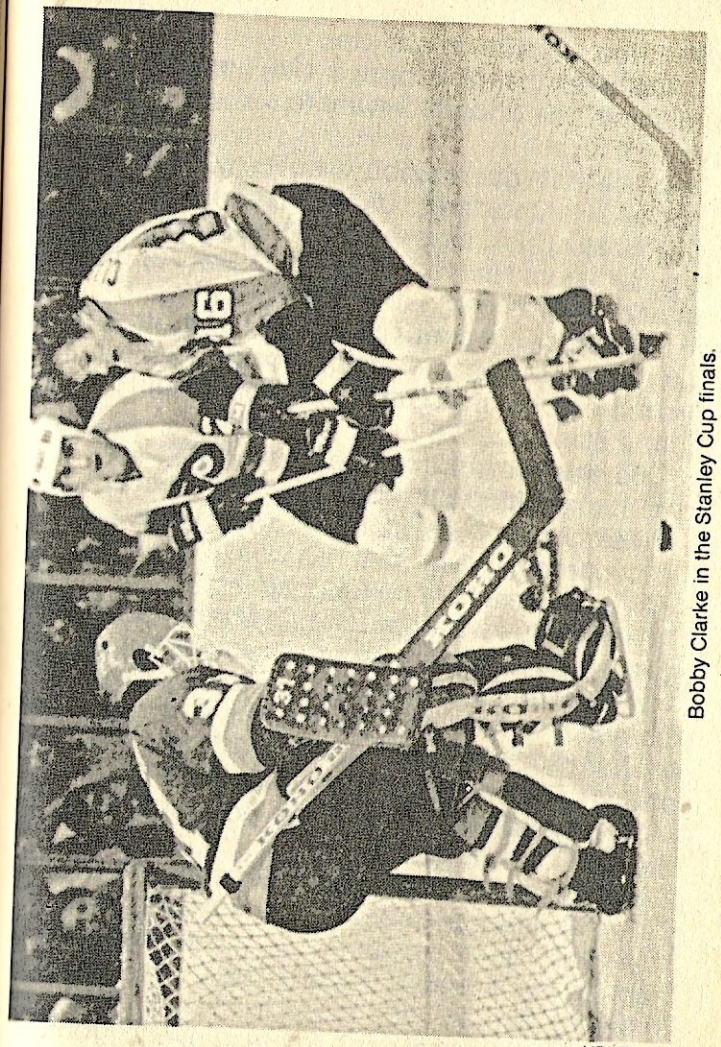
Clarke was born in Flin Flon on August 13, 1949. As soon as he could walk, his parents put him on the ice.

"Bobby learned to skate on an open-air rink and he lived there morning, noon, and night," said his mother. "Of course, that still wasn't enough hockey for him. So we had another rink out in the garden. Many's the time he'd shoot the puck off the side of the house . . . and a few times through the window."

When he was eight Bobby lied about his age to sign up for Tom Thumb level hockey. Playing with kids a couple of years older was no problem for young Clarke. His opponents were bigger and stronger. Bobby learned how to take punishment—and how to dish it out.

Bobby impressed everyone in Tom Thumb, Pee Wee, and Midget hockey. But in his teens he met up with a medical problem. The doctors said Bobby had diabetes. And diabetes seriously affects a person's energy level. An athlete needs a high energy level all of the time. A lot of people told Bobby he should quit ice hockey. He refused.

"It's no big deal," he says today. "I just take my needles [daily shots], watch my diet, and try to do my thing. Some play with bad backs or knees. Some play with plates in their skulls. I



Bobby Clarke in the Stanley Cup finals.

UPI Photo

don't feel unusual in any way.

"Diabetes hasn't stopped me from doing anything," he added. "I want to live, so I take care of myself."

By the tenth grade Bobby was ready for junior hockey. He decided to drop out of school and devote all of his time to the ice. He had made the big decision. He wasn't going to work in the mines. He was going to the NHL.

Pat Ginnell coached the Flin Flon Bombers of the Western Canada Junior Hockey League. He remembered his first impressions about the future all-star center.

"He was wearing glasses, had buck teeth, and looked kind of thin on the ice," recalled Ginnell. "But once he started moving, there was no doubt in my mind that this was going to be one of the best kids I ever coached."

Within a few years much had changed. The glasses were gone in favor of contact lenses. The buck teeth were gone, too. Bobby's gap-toothed grin later became famous. Bobby put on height and weight, up to 5'10" and 185 pounds. But one thing hadn't changed—Clarke played good hockey. And he got better and better.

Bobby joined the Flin Flon Bombers for the 1967-68 junior season. He played 59 games that year. He scored a fine 51 goals. He also handed out a league record 117 assists and scored a league record 168 points. Bobby's willingness to assist on other players' goal

attempts was unusual. Most junior players want all the glory for themselves. Not Bobby Clarke. He was a team player. He was thrilled when one of his passes set up a goal.

Bobby again scored 51 goals in the 1968-69 Flin Flon season. His 86 assists and 137 points led the team. He was named to the league's all-star first team.

Clarke was eligible for the 1969 amateur player draft by the NHL. His record made him one of the top players in all of junior hockey. But his diabetes scared some of the teams away.

Jerry Melnyk scouted Clarke for the Philadelphia Flyers. "The boy never stops skating," reported Melnyk. "He's got enough stamina for a whole team."

The Flyers, like the other NHL clubs, were still unsure about Clarke. The first round was completed. Clarke had not been taken. The Flyers gambled and took Bobby during the second round.

Philadelphia's number one pick from 1969 is no longer playing NHL hockey. He wasn't good enough. Bobby Clarke was more than good enough. And he proved it right from the start. Clarke never played a minor league hockey game. He reported directly to the Flyers for the 1969-70 season.

Bobby was really excited about his first day of practice with the Flyers. He was so excited that he forgot to eat breakfast. During practice that

day he fainted. The same thing happened the next day. His coaches worried about his diabetes. The Flyers wondered if they had made a mistake signing Clarke. But the problem was quickly solved. Bobby remembered from then on to eat a good breakfast every morning.

The Flyers opened the 1969-70 season against the Minnesota North Stars. Bobby Clarke will always remember his first NHL game.

"First time a pass came my way, Bill Goldsworthy stole the puck from me and scored," he remembered. "Some start!"

Clarke played in 76 games during his rookie season. He scored 15 goals and 31 assists for 46 points. He was named Rookie of the Year in a poll of NHL players. But the Flyers won only 17 games that year. They finished in fifth place in their division.

Bobby's play improved during the 1970-71 season. And so did the play of the Flyers. In 77 games Clarke had 63 points. He scored 27 goals and 36 assists. The Flyers improved to third place in their division and made the playoffs. But Philly was knocked out in the opening round.

Clarke developed into a fine player during his third season. In 1971-72 he scored 81 points, a Flyers' record. He got the points with 35 goals and 46 assists in 78 games. The NHL awarded Clarke the Masterton Trophy at the end of the season. The Masterton is given each year to the player showing the most sportsmanship and

dedication to hockey. But the Flyers managed only a so-so record and missed the playoffs. That has not happened since then.

Before the 1972-73 season, Flyers' coach Fred Shero named Clarke the captain of the team. The 23-year-old center thus became the youngest captain in NHL history.

"I don't care if you're 18 or 50, if you've got leadership qualities, you've got them," said Shero. "And Clarke's got 'em."

Captain Clarke became a full-fledged star during that 1972-73 season. And the Flyers became a solid, winning team right along with him. One night they managed an amazing 7-6 upset of the always-tough Montreal Canadiens. In that game Bobby scored three goals, a hat trick.

Bobby scored 37 goals and 67 assists while playing in all 78 games. His 104 points was second best in the NHL. He became only the ninth player in the NHL history to break 100 points. After the season he was named second team all-NHL. To top it all off, he was later named the Most Valuable Player in the league. With that honor he received the Hart Trophy.

The Flyers achieved their best record ever in 1972-73. The 37-30-11 mark was the first winning record in the team's history. Philly won its first-round series in the Stanley Cup playoffs. But the Flyers fell, 4-1, in the semifinal round to Montreal.

Great things were expected from Clarke and

his Flyers in 1973-74. They didn't let their fans down. In 77 games Bobby scored 87 points on 35 goals and 52 assists. The captain also led the Flyers to an amazing 50-16-12 regular season record. Only two other teams in NHL history had won 50 games in a single season.

Philly opened the playoffs against the Atlanta Flames. The Flyers swept the series in four games. The New York Rangers fought the Flyers even for six games in the semifinal round. But Philly won the deciding seventh game. The Flyers won a chance to play for the Stanley Cup.

Philadelphia met the Boston Bruins in the 1974 Stanley Cup playoffs. The first two games were set for Boston. The Flyers hadn't won in Boston in their last 18 tries. The Bruins won the first game of the series. Now the streak was up to 19.

Boston took a 2-0 lead in the second game of the playoffs. Clarke scored a goal to close the gap to 2-1. But time was running out on the Flyers. With less than a minute left in the game, Bobby struck a perfect pass. The Flyers scored. The game went into overtime.

Twelve minutes into overtime Bobby Clarke struck again. He skated and pushed and bullied his way through the entire Boston defense. His shot eased past the goalie. The Flyers won, 3-2.

"He played like a man possessed," said an observer after watching Clarke's performance.

The series belonged to the Flyers after that upset victory. In six games Clarke scored six

points to lead all scorers. And the Stanley Cup belonged to the Flyers.

All of Philadelphia celebrated the victory. Nearly two million people greeted the Flyers in a motorcade through downtown. One sign on the route said: "Bobby Clarke for Mayor."

"The Philadelphia victory was probably the biggest event that ever happened in hockey," declared NHL president Clarence Campbell.

Praise was heaped onto Clarke after the Stanley Cup win.

"The way Clarkie went at it for every minute of every game made us all try harder," said teammate Ed Van Impe.

"Clarke is our leader. He's the guy that makes us go," said Flyers' goalie Bernie Parent.

"There may be better hockey players, but none with more determination," said Phil Esposito of the losing Bruins.

With the praise also came some criticism. Some players and fans accused Clarke of playing too rough. They claimed he made up for lack of skill by beating up on his opponents.

"I'm just aggressive," answered Clarke. "In hockey, you've got to be. I'm too small to be a dirty hockey player."

The Flyers didn't let down after winning their first Stanley Cup. In 1974-75 the Flyers won 51 games, one more than the previous year. And Philly won the division title once again.

Captain Clarke had his best season yet in 1974-75. In 80 games he scored 116 points.

The points came from 27 goals and a league-leading 89 assists. The 89 assists also set an NHL record. Clarke was finally named first team all-NHL. And for the second time he received the Hart Trophy as the NHL's Most Valuable Player.

The Flyers knocked off the Toronto Maple Leafs in the first round of the playoffs. The next victims were the New York Islanders in a tough seven-game series. Philadelphia met the Buffalo Sabres in the Stanley Cup finals. The Sabres made it to the finals by upsetting the Montreal Canadiens.

Once again the finals lasted six games. And once again the Flyers captured the Stanley Cup. Bobby Clarke, always the team man, led everyone in playoff assists with 12.

The 1975-76 Flyers swept to one of the best regular season records in NHL history: 51-13-16. Again they won their division. And again they entered the playoffs. They sought a third straight Stanley Cup.

Bobby had his best season ever that year. In 76 games he scored 30 goals and tied his record-setting 89 assists. His 119 points was his best yet. Once again he was named first team all-NHL. And he won his third Hart Trophy as the NHL's Most Valuable Player.

Clarke was also a part of another record. He and linemates Bill Barker and Reggie Leach scored an NHL-record 332 points that year. Clarke's assists helped Leach lead the NHL in

goals with 61.

The Flyers opened the playoffs with a sweep of the Toronto Maple Leafs. Philadelphia then routed Boston. In one game against the Bruins, Leach scored a record-tying five goals. But the Flyers lost steam after a tough series with Boston. The Montreal Canadiens won four straight games in the finals. The Stanley Cup was gone from Philadelphia.

Clarke still led in playoff assists with 14. His passes and play-making helped Leach score a record 19 goals during the series.

"With Bobby I know that all I have to do is skate to an open spot on the ice and I'll get the puck," said Leach. "It's usually right on the stick. From there, it's just a matter of pulling the trigger."

The Flyers again won their division in 1976-77. And Bobby had another fine season with 90 points on 27 goals and 63 assists. But the Flyers failed to regain the Stanley Cup.

Philadelphia fell to second place in both 1977-78 and 1978-79. And Bobby's point production fell, too. In 1977-78 he scored 89 points with 21 goals and 68 assists. And in 1978-79 he dropped to 73 points on 16 goals and 57 assists. And in both years the Flyers fell short in the playoffs.

The Flyers bounced back to their second best record ever in 1979-80. The 48-12-20 record included one 35-game unbeaten streak. Clarke, now an assistant coach for the team,

scored 12 goals and 57 assists. His 69 points was his lowest total since his second season.

Philly entered the playoffs with the best record in the NHL. But Bobby Clarke wasn't impressed. "The only thing people ever remember is who won the Stanley Cup," he reminded everyone.

The Flyers swept into the 1980 finals by ripping the Minnesota North Stars in five games. The North Stars had upset Montreal in the earlier round. So the Philly victory was especially important.

But the New York Islanders proved to be too tough in the finals. The Islanders won the series in six games for their first Stanley Cup.

Bobby finished the 1980 playoffs with 103 career playoff points. That put him 13th on the all-time playoff scoring list. He also finished the season as the all-time leading scorer in Flyers' history. He had averaged an incredible 1.1 points per game over 11 tough NHL seasons. With 63 points in 1980-81 Bobby Clarke will become only the 13th player in NHL history to break the 1,000-point mark.

Those 11 tough NHL seasons had also given Clarke a chance to prove something else. Back in 1969 a lot of people didn't think the diabetic from Flin Flon could play in the NHL.

Now everyone knows that he can.

GILBERT PERREAULT
(Buffalo Sabres)

One of the most popular movies in 1971 and 1972 was *The French Connection.* The action-packed film was set on the streets of New York City.

Further upstate, in Buffalo, another "French Connection" was forming. This French Connection belonged to the Buffalo Sabres. Center Gil Perreault anchored this high-scoring line. He fed to wings René Robert and Rick Martin. For a number of years the French Connection line was one of the most successful in all the NHL.

Perreault, Robert, and Martin were all born and raised in the province of Quebec. French is spoken in Quebec. The trio "connected" on goal after goal for year after year. Thus the French Connection was formed.

In the middle of this successful line is Perreault. During the 1970s Perreault was one of the most steady players in the NHL. He never won a scoring title or led the league in any major offensive category. But year in and year out he gave full measure on the ice. And then some. Because of Perreault the Sabres became one

of the most successful expansion teams in professional sports.

The 6', 197-pound speedster was born in Victoriaville, Quebec, on November 13, 1950. Like all sports-minded boys in Quebec, he learned skating and walking at just about the same time.

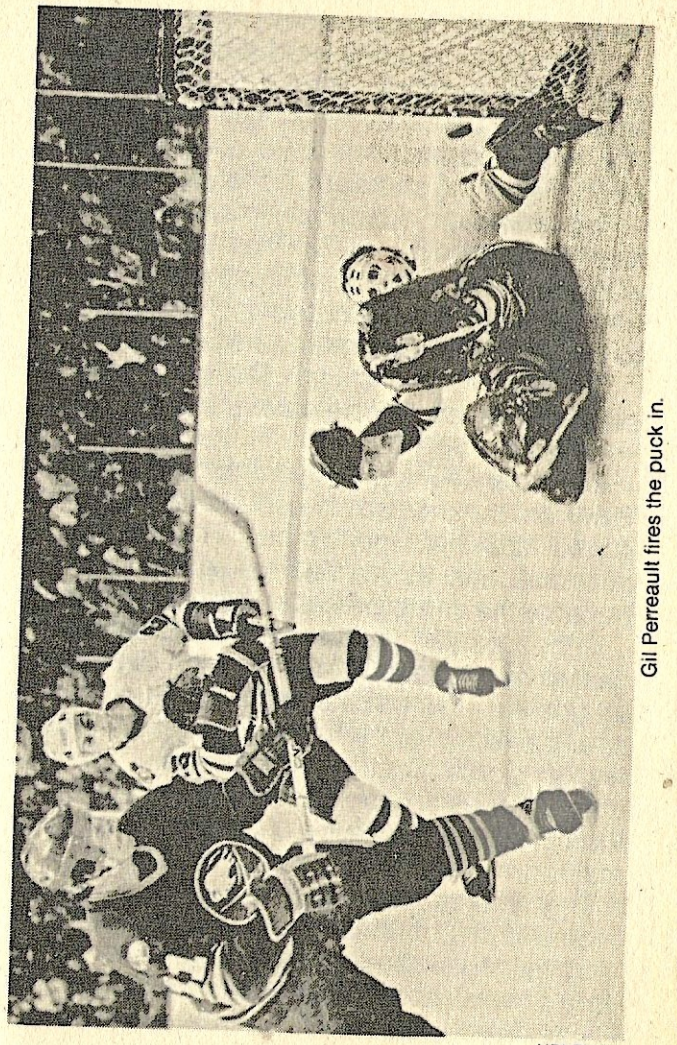
Gilbert played in all of the usual levels of youth hockey, including Midget and Pee Wee leagues. "All of it was a thrill," he recalled later.

Perreault moved up to the Montreal Junior Canadiens for the 1967-68 season. The Canadiens played in the tough "A" division of the Ontario Hockey Association. Many an NHL superstar got his start in the OHA.

The left-handed shooting Perreault played in 47 games in that first junior season. He scored 15 goals and dished out 34 assists for 49 points.

Gilbert almost doubled his output during the 1968-69 season. In 54 games he bagged 37 goals and 60 assists for a fine 97 points. At the end of the season he was named first team all-OHA. The Junior Canadiens won the Memorial Cup that year. The Cup goes to the best junior level team in Canada.

Perreault's play stood out in the OHA during the 1969-70 season. In 54 games he scored 51 goals and 70 assists for 121 points. Once again he made first team all-OHA. He ended his junior career as the OHA's Most Valuable Player for 1969-70. In addition, the Canadiens captured



Gil Perreault fires the puck in.

UPI Photo

the Memorial Cup for the second straight year.

The National Hockey League coaches gathered in the summer of 1970 for the annual amateur draft. This draft was different from most. The NHL had expanded. Several new teams would be getting shots at the best junior players.

The new teams from Buffalo and Vancouver had the first two picks. Gil Perreault figured he would end up with one of those clubs. But he had to admit that deep down inside he wanted to play with the Montreal Canadiens.

"Every boy growing up in Quebec wanted to play with Montreal," he said. "Now I'm glad it was Buffalo."

Perreault was impressive right from the start. Early on he showed the speed for which he would later become famous. His rink-length offensive attacks excited the spectators. He became the centerpiece for this first-year club.

Gilbert played in every one of Buffalo's 78 games during that 1970-71 season. He scored 38 goals and 34 assists for 72 points. His point total broke the old NHL rookie record. So did his 38 goals. For the only time in his NHL career, Perreault scored more goals than assists. From his second season on, passing and playmaking became his trademarks.

The Sabres managed a decent 24-39-15 record in their first NHL season. At the end of the year the Sabres and Perreault received a very special honor. Gilbert was awarded the Calder Trophy as the NHL Rookie of the Year.

His teammates also named him Most Valuable Player on the Sabres.

The Sabres won only 16 games in 1971-72. But Perreault had another strong season. He scored 26 goals and 48 assists for 74 points. Many of those assists went to rookie Rick Martin on the left wing. Martin scored 44 goals and 30 assists for 74 points. Martin's 44 goals broke Perreault's one-year-old rookie record. And Gilbert's passing helped the record fall! With Martin now on the front line, two-thirds of the French Connection had come together.

Rene Robert had come over from the Pittsburgh Penguins late in the 1971-72 season. He took the first line right wing job at the start of the 1972-73 season. The French Connection was born. The line scored an impressive 244 points that season. The trio led the Sabres to their best record yet: 37-27-14. The Sabres even made the playoffs at the end of the season.

Perreault handed out an impressive 60 assists during 1972-73. With his 28 goals he scored a personal high 88 points. At the end of the NHL season he was awarded the Lady Byng Trophy. This award is given each year to the NHL player who best combines excellent play with good sportsmanship.

The flashy center missed 23 games during the 1973-74 season because of a fractured left ankle. He played in only 55 games, scoring 18 goals and 33 assists. His 51 points was (and is) his career low. Buffalo suffered without Perreault

in the lineup. The team fell to 32-34-12 that year. The Sabres also missed the playoffs.

Perreault strained his left knee during the 1974-75 season and missed ten games. But this time the Sabres carried on without him. Buffalo roared to a surprising 49-16-15 record. The Sabres won their first division title ever. Buffalo prepared for a shot at the Stanley Cup.

The French Connection had a sensational season in leading the Sabres. Perreault scored 39 goals and 57 assists for 96 points. Robert scored 100 points and Martin hit for 95. Together the linemates piled up 291 points.

Buffalo continued to surprise the hockey world in the playoffs. The Sabres knocked off the Chicago Black Hawks in the quarterfinals, four games to one.

The Sabres went on to meet the Montreal Canadiens in the semifinals. Most hockey experts figured the Sabres would be beaten in the worst way by the Canadiens. In two of the games they were correct. Montreal scored seven goals and eight goals in a pair of lopsided victories. But four other games went to the Sabres. Somehow the young Buffalo club had upset the powerful Canadiens.

Perreault led the amazing Sabres into the Stanley Cup finals against the Philadelphia Flyers. Buffalo's dreams came crashing down in short order. The Flyers won the Cup in six games.

"When you're in the Cup finals you have to

play the best hockey of your life," said Gilbert. "Just being there was one of the biggest moments in my career."

The Sabres didn't lose through lack of scoring punch by Perreault. He took a team record 66 shots on goal in the 17 playoff games. His 9 assists and 15 points were also Buffalo records.

Buffalo kept up its hot play in the 1975-76 season. The Sabres ran up a 46-21-13 record, but fell to second in their division. The Sabres were knocked out of the playoffs in an early round.

A healthy Perreault had his finest season in 1975-76. In 80 games he scored more goals (44) and more assists (69) than in any other season. His 113 points was also a career high. The French Connection scored 286 points, their second best ever.

Gilbert finally made second team all-NHL in 1975-76. He repeated that honor in 1976-77 by scoring 95 points on 39 goals and 56 assists. For the second straight season the speedy center played in all 80 of the team's games.

Buffalo had its second best season ever in 1976-77. Their 48-24-8 record gave them another second place finish. But once again the Sabres died quickly in the playoffs.

The Sabres finished second again in 1977-78. And once again they received an early exit from the playoffs. But Perreault had another solid season. In 79 games he scored 41 goals and 48 assists for 89 points.

Buffalo tailed off to a 36-28-16 record in 1978-79. That was the team's worst record in five years. But it was again good enough for second place. This time the Pittsburgh Penguins helped the Sabres to early vacations from the playoffs. Perreault also suffered a slight slump that season. He netted a five-year low of 85 points on 27 goals and 58 assists.

Perreault and the Sabres made a major comeback in the 1979-80 season. In 80 games Gilbert scored 40 goals and 66 assists. His 106 points was fourth best in the NHL. Perreault's play led Buffalo to its second-best season ever. The 47-17-16 mark was good enough for first place in the division. Only the Philadelphia Flyers had a better record in the whole NHL.

The Sabres entered the playoffs as the number two ranked team. Buffalo, as expected, romped through the first two playoff rounds. But in the semifinals the Sabres fell to the New York Islanders in six games. The Islanders went on to win the Stanley Cup. Buffalo ended the season empty-handed once again.

"We had a good season," said Perreault. "During the playoffs we played well, but... but I have no excuses. A better team beat us."

Gilbert entered the 1980-81 season as the last of the original Buffalo Sabres. He held the team records for career goals, assists, and total points. But one of his career goals has yet to be fulfilled.

"I would like to win the Cup," said Gilbert

Perreault. "No other goals are important. I want the Cup."

Three Rising Stars
Dale McCourt
Don Maloney
Buddy Cloutier

DALE MCCOURT
(Detroit Red Wings)

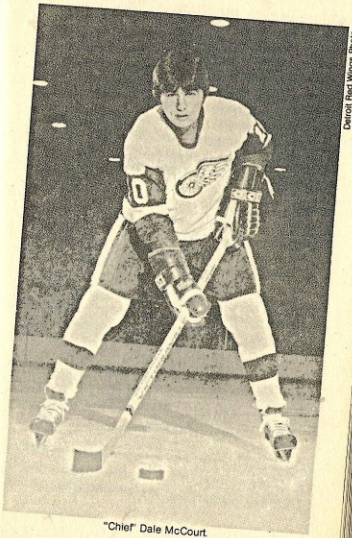
In 1976-77 the Detroit Red Wings had a horrible 16-55-9 record. That was the worst record in all the National Hockey League. Only one good thing resulted from that terrible season. The Red Wings got first choice in the 1977 NHL amateur draft.

Their choice was Dale McCourt. The young McCourt helped Detroit to one of the biggest comebacks in NHL history. The rookie led the Red Wings to a 32-34-14 record in 1977-78. With McCourt, Detroit made the playoffs for the first time in eight years.

"He's got major league style and class," said McCourt's coach, Bobby Kromm, after that turnaround season.

McCourt was born in Falconridge, Ontario, on January 26, 1957. He received his first pair of ice skates when he was five years old. He learned to skate in a backyard rink built by his father. He learned ice hockey from his uncle, George Armstrong. In the early 1960s, Armstrong was captain of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

McCourt began his junior career in 1972-73.



Detroit Red Wings Photo

"Chief" Dale McCourt

He played with the Sudbury Wolves of the Ontario Hockey Association. In 26 games he scored 6 goals and 11 assists for 17 points.

Dale moved over to the Hamilton Red Wings for the 1973-74 season. In 69 games he grabbed 20 goals and 38 assists for 58 points.

In 1974-75, with the Hamilton Fincups, McCourt began to show all-star form. In 69 games he scored 52 goals and a fine 126 points. He did even better the next season. In 66 games he scored 55 goals and 84 assists for 139 points. Dale was named first team all-OHA. He was the league's Most Gentlemanly Player. And he was named Most Valuable Player for the playoffs.

McCourt spent his final season of juniors with the St. Catharine's Fincups. In 1976-77 he played 66 games, scoring 60 goals and 79 assists. His 139 points was second best in the league. At the end of the season he again made first team all-OHA. And again he was named the league's Most Gentlemanly Player. To top it off, the OHA named McCourt its Most Valuable Player.

The 5'10", 185-pound center then moved up to the NHL as the number one pick of the Red Wings. McCourt brought his nickname with him to the pros. He's called Chief because some of his ancestors were Indians.

McCourt had a fine rookie season in 1977-78. In 76 games he scored a team-high 33 goals. His 39 assists was second best on the

team. And his 72 points led the team. Only Mike Bossy of the Islanders had more points among rookies that year.

McCourt's play led the Red Wings to their best record in five years. Detroit finished second in the division and entered the playoffs for the first time in eight years. The Red Wings knocked off the Atlanta Flames in the first playoff round. But the Montreal Canadiens bumped Detroit in five games in the next round. In the seven games, Chief had four goals and two assists.

Dale's play remained steady during the 1978-79 season. In 79 games he scored 28 goals, 43 assists, and 71 points. All three totals were second best on the club. But the Red Wings fell on hard times again as a team. Detroit's 23-41-16 record put the Red Wings in last place in their division.

Detroit did no better as a team in 1979-80. The 26-43-11 record again was the worst in the division. But McCourt had his best season yet. The new team captain played in all 80 games. He scored 30 goals and 51 assists for 81 points. His point total led the Wings. Only eight players in team history scored more than 81 points in a season. His assists total also led the team. Only five players in the 54-year history of the Wings ever handed out more assists.

McCourt entered the 1980-81 season as the highest active scorer on the Red Wings. That's pretty good after only three years in Detroit.

He'll need many more high-scoring seasons if the Red Wings are ever going to turn the corner and win again.

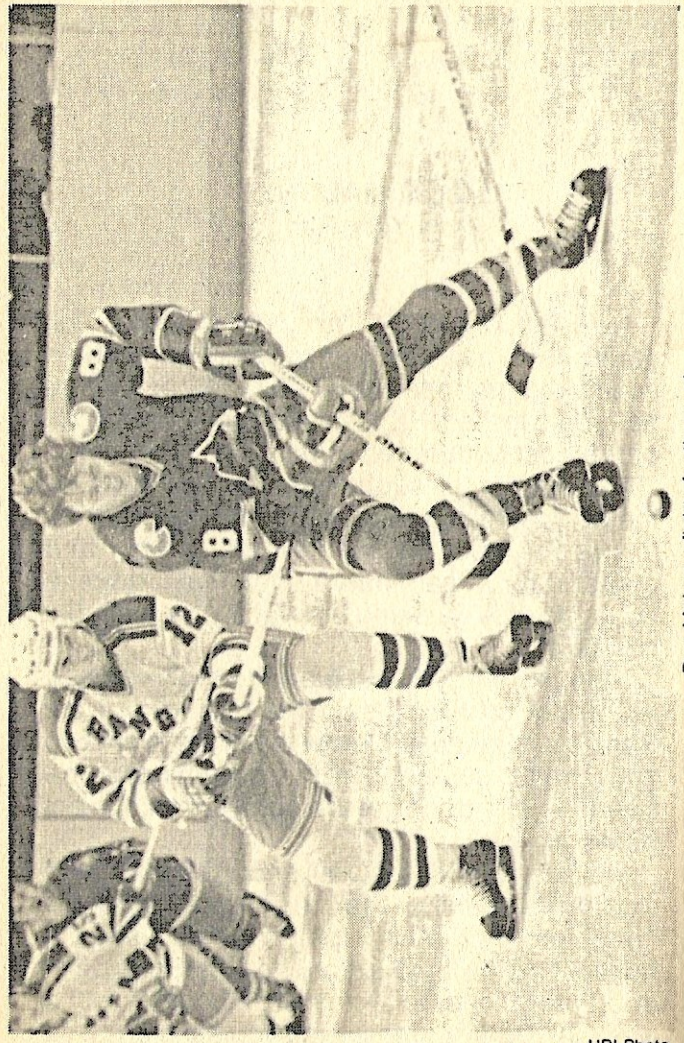
DON MALONEY
(New York Rangers)

He's not big at 6'1" and 190 pounds. But young Don Maloney is as tough in the corners as any big guy in the NHL. After only one and a half years in the NHL, his coach called him "one of the best cornermen in hockey."

The cornerman's job is simple. He fights for the puck in the corners around the net. He tries to pry the puck loose from the boards and center it for a teammate's shot. Playing those corners takes guts and strength. Don Maloney has both.

"The more guys I have on me in the corner, the better off I am," said the left wing of the Rangers. "Because I know that if there are two guys on me, someone from my team has to be open. And if I don't get the puck to him; I'm not doing my job."

Maloney did his job well enough in 1979-80 to win the hearts of the tough New York fans. They liked his fighting spirit and never-say-die hustle. And the female fans liked his good looks and flashy style. By the end of the season he was making TV commercials for jeans and soft



Don Maloney fights for the puck.

UPI Photo

drinks.

Don Maloney was born on September 5, 1958, in Lindsay, Ontario. He grew up playing hockey with Dave, his older brother. Dave Maloney is now a defenseman with the Rangers.

Don played his junior hockey with the Kitchener Rangers of the Ontario Hockey Association. In 1974-75, his first junior season he played in only five games. But in those games he scored one goal and three assists.

In 1975-76 the left-shooting winger played full time with Kitchener. In 61 games he scored 27 goals and 41 assists for 68 points. Maloney's stats fell off some in 1976-77 because of injuries. In 38 games he piled up 22 goals and 34 assists for 56 points.

Maloney had his biggest season in the juniors in 1977-78. In 62 games he scored 30 goals and dished out a fine 74 assists. That's better than an assist per game. Don's 104 points was by far his career high in juniors.

The New York Rangers didn't have a first round pick in the 1978 NHL amateur draft. The Rangers made Maloney their first draft pick in the second round of the draft. He was the 26th player selected overall.

Maloney started the 1978-79 season in the minor leagues. He played for the New Haven Nighthawks in the American Hockey League. In 38 games he scored 18 goals and 26 assists for 44 points.

In February 1979, the Rangers promoted

Maloney to the big club. Maloney was placed on a line with center Phil Esposito and right wing Don "Murder" Murdoch. The combination clicked instantly.

Maloney's first NHL game was a huge success. He scored a goal on his very first shot, a jam from behind the net. Later in the game he fired a long pass to Esposito for a breakaway goal. The Rangers crushed the tough Boston Bruins, 5-1.

The Maloney-Esposito-Murdoch line was one of the best in the NHL for the rest of the 1978-79 season. In the last 27 games the trio scored 36 goals and 47 assists. Their play helped the Rangers to a 40-29-11 record. That was good enough for third place in the league's toughest division. The finish also earned the Rangers a spot in the playoffs.

Maloney had 9 goals, 17 assists, and 26 points in his 28 regular season games that rookie year. The flashy Maloney almost equaled those totals during an amazing playoff series.

The Rangers opened the playoffs by topping Marcel Dionne and his Los Angeles Kings. Bobby Clarke's Philadelphia Flyers fell to the Rangers in the quarterfinals. In the semifinals the Rangers met their crosstown rivals, the New York Islanders. The Islanders were heavily favored. But the Rangers pulled off an upset, shocking the hockey world. The Rangers battled the Montreal Canadiens in the Stanley Cup finals. Montreal rambled past New York in five games. After the final loss, rookie Don Maloney

leaned his head on one of the goal cross-bars and cried.

But Maloney had nothing to be ashamed about. In 18 playoff games he had 7 goals and 13 assists. His 20 points was the most ever scored by an NHL rookie in the Cup playoffs.

The Maloney-Esposito-Murdoch line continued its hot play at the start of the 1979-80 season. In the first 27 games the trio had 29 goals and 43 assists. Maloney closed out the season with 28 points in his last 21 games. Overall he had 25 goals and 48 assists in 79 games. His 73 points was second highest on the team.

The Rangers again finished third in their division with a 38-32-10 record. New York made it to the second playoff round before losing. In nine playoff games young Maloney had four assists.

Maloney entered the 1980-81 season with 99 points in his first 107 NHL games. An average of a point per game over a career makes for stardom. And Don Maloney is on his way.

BUDDY CLOUTIER
(Quebec Nordiques)

"He is the greatest player to come into the game in the last ten years," said Quebec coach Jacques Demers. "The guy is simply amazing."

Demers was singing the praises of his star player, Real "Buddy" Cloutier. Praise like that has usually been reserved for players like Wayne Gretzky or Mike Bossy or Guy Lafleur. But Buddy Cloutier has earned the praise. Twice he led the World Hockey Association in scoring. Every time he took the ice he impressed opponets and fans. He showed them incredible speed, quickness, and puck sense. Buddy Cloutier has the makings of a star.

"By far, he's the best player in our league," said John Ferguson of the Winnipeg Jets before the WHA folded. "Besides being a great scorer, he's a very good playmaker. And he's very, very exciting."

"He lifts me out of my seat the way he moves," said Max McNab of the NHL Washington Capitals.

The speedy winger was born on July 30, 1956, in St. Emile, Quebec. He played in all of

Buddy Cloutier—the whiz kid of hockey.

Quebec Nordiques Photo

the usual youth hockey leagues as a youngster. When it came time for junior hockey he signed with the Quebec Remparts of the Quebec Junior Hockey League. Years earlier the Remparts had launched Guy Lafleur to stardom.

In 1972-73 Cloutier played in 57 games with the Remparts. He scored 39 goals and a fine 60 assists. His 99 points put him among the league leaders.

Buddy had an incredible junior season in 1973-74. In 69 games he scored an amazing 93 goals. But he had an even more amazing 123 assists—almost two per game. His 216-point total was almost unbelievable to most hockey fans. Despite his stats, Buddy only made second team all-star at season's end.

Cloutier wasn't technically old enough to be drafted in 1974. But the Quebec Nordiques took the 5'10", 185-pound hometown star anyway. Buddy signed with the WHA team before the 1974-75 season.

Buddy had a decent rookie season with 53 points on 26 goals and 27 assists. The rookie led Quebec to its first-ever division title. But the Nordiques fell short in the playoffs.

Cloutier doubled his scoring in 1975-76. In 80 games he scored 60 goals and 54 assists. He was among the league leaders with his total of 114 points. After the season he was named second team all-WHA. Quebec had its best record ever that year, winning 50 games. But the Nordiques fell to second in their division

and again fell short in the playoffs.

In 1976-77 Cloutier and his teammates put it all together. Buddy scored 66 goals and 75 assists in 76 games. Five of those goals came in a single game against the Phoenix Roadrunners. Cloutier won his first WHA scoring title with 141 points. Once again he made second team all-WHA. The Nordiques won their division title and rambled through the playoffs. Quebec won its first Avco Cup, the WHA answer to the Stanley Cup. Buddy led everyone in playoff goals with 14.

Cloutier's stats fell off a little in 1977-78. But he finally made first team all-WHA. He scored 56 goals and 73 assists in 73 games for a total of 129 points. The Nordiques had a winning season but fell to fourth in the division.

The 1978-79 season proved to be the last one for the WHA. And Buddy Cloutier ended up as the league's final scoring champion. In 77 games he scored 75 goals and 54 assists for 129 points. Buddy chased the magical 80-goal mark most of the season. But he was shut out in his last five games. Buddy made first team all-WHA for the second straight year. The Nordiques finished their WHA life with their sixth straight winning season.

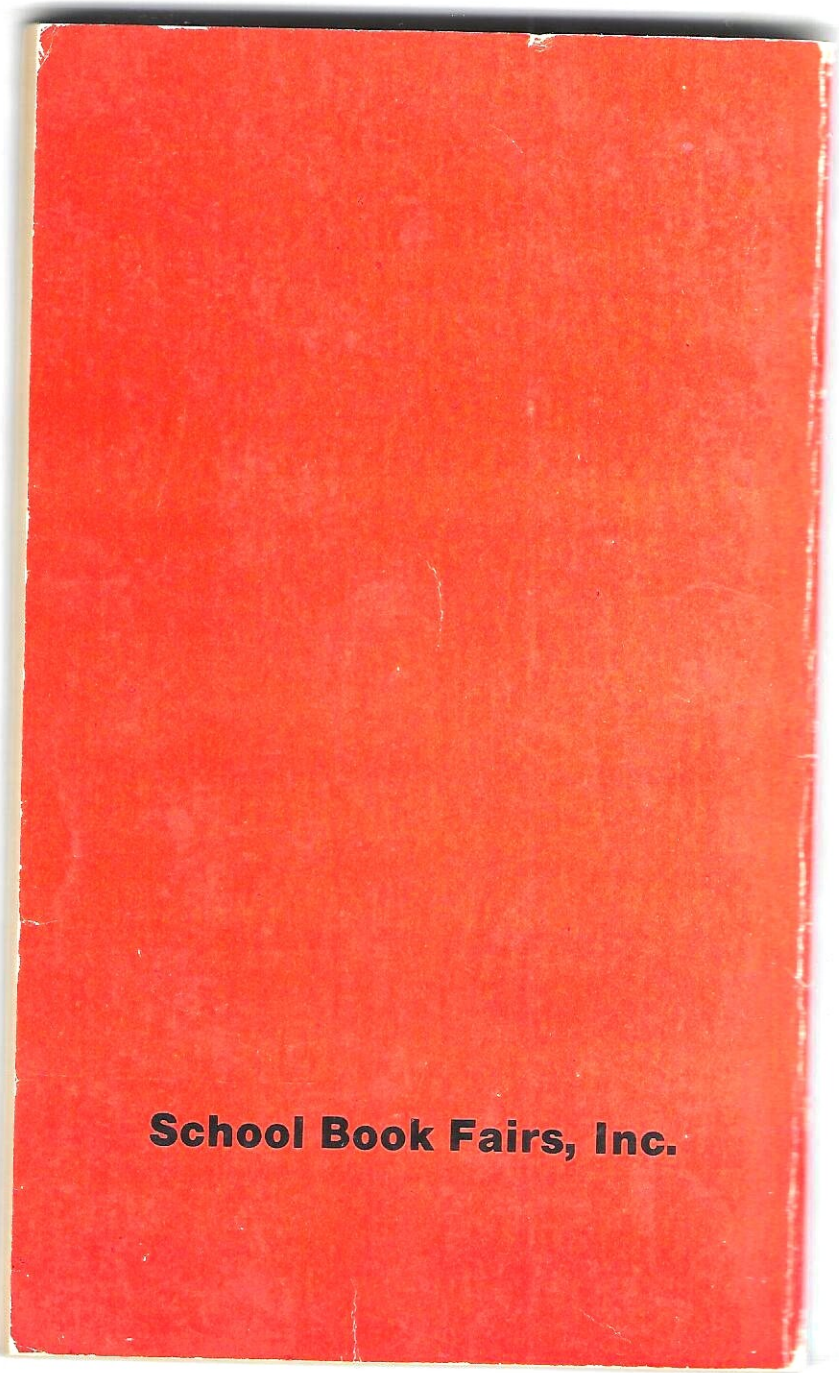
Four of the WHA teams joined the NHL for the 1979-80 season. Quebec was one of those teams. The Nordiques fell to a 25-44-11 record in their first NHL season. In 67 games Buddy scored 42 goals and 46 assists for 88 points.

Cloutier finished the season on a strong note, however. In his last four games he scored seven goals and had six assists for thirteen points.

The Nordiques were counting heavily on Cloutier for the 1980-81 NHL season. But in August 1980, he injured himself. Buddy shattered his ankle sliding into home plate during a baseball game near Montreal. Doctors expected him to miss the first 25 games of the season.

"This season I was going for 50 goals and 100 points," said a disappointed Buddy Cloutier. "But I guess I can forget about that."

He could forget about those totals for the 1980-81 season. But hockey experts foresee many 100-point seasons waiting in the future for this whiz kid of hockey.


School Book Fairs, Inc.